



Questioni pedagogiche e formative

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Viviana De Angelis

The school of dreams

*Advanced pedagogical paradigms
and programs for complex societies*



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Introduction

In the contemporary pedagogical cultural debate, there emerges an awareness that the theory of education still fails to clarify either its object of investigation in relation, especially, to the human sciences or its interdependent relationship with other humanistic disciplines, such as philosophy, anthropology and theology. These are historically devoted to the understanding of the human (including in multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic contexts) and are indispensable to being able to found a normative philosophy of education, that is, a practical science of values capable of facing the great current challenge of the renewal of the individual, society and democracy, through education.

The weakness of the theory of education translates, firstly, into a lack of political and decision-making influence on the part of pedagogy, and secondly, more specifically, into an impoverishment of the educational project suitable for promoting democracy in the world, cultural pluralism, and the political and economic development of contemporary societies.

The possibility of overcoming the current gaps in educational theory lies, in our opinion, in the ability that practitioners of this discipline will have in the coming decades to reconcile two indispensable and complementary tools of pedagogical theory.

The first is the paradigm of the critical emancipation pedagogy,

which reflects on the complexity and problematic nature of educational processes, pedagogical devices and the set of institutional, organizational and technical practices of today's societies.

The second is the hermeneutic and interpretative paradigm of a new, recently generated and still nascent socio-ethical-affective pedagogy.

It takes the form of a newly acquired theoretical-practical attitude, inspired by the current philosophy of care and ethical exemplarism of a philosophical-religious nature.

The new socio-ethical-affective pedagogy proposes understanding, kindness, astonishment, expectation, example, experience, cooperation inclusion and personalized accompaniment of pupils in integral growth processes as effective means to activate in pupils, and sustain over time, the individual cognitive processes linked to motivation and learning.

The socio-ethical-affective pedagogy that we intend to propose here has the advantage of being able to teach those involved in education to reflect in depth on the complex emotional, cognitive, relational and cultural dynamics of individuals, which are sometimes implicit and underlying in educational action.

It is continually immersed in the active and in-depth search for the root causes of certain behaviours and effects that, more often than not, are not understood by those with educational responsibility and that frequently become the object of misunderstandings, misconceptions and prejudices.

The observational attitude of socio-ethical-affective pedagogy consists in the assumption of a mild, open, curious, humble, loving and interpreting gaze, never contemptuous nor judgmental and inclined towards the knowledge of others. Respectful love for the unique and unrepeatable identity of the other and the safeguarding of the supreme goods of mutual trust, the integral human progress of each pupil and the harmony of the entire education community are the only inviolable laws of its action – an action that is sometimes made more explicit and manifest through direct teaching by the teacher of some cultural object, and that at other times, by necessity, remains implicit and even hidden, so as to leave room for the freedom of others.

This freedom is not merely reduced to thinking and performing an assigned teaching task but leaves room for personal initiative and for individual capacities and talents to emerge, grow and develop.

At times, then, the reflective and didactic actions of the teacher, capable of embodying a socio-ethical-affective pedagogy, faced with the negative reality of limitation, misunderstanding, rejection and repeating error, is called upon by his professional role and even more so by his educational mission to train the younger generations, to transcend the evidence.

Sometimes, in fact, it is necessary to transcend the experience of the moment, go beyond the frontiers of mere empirical data and inhabit the dimension of trusting expectation of a better time in which it is possible to discern the shoots of improvement and growth in the pupil.

Such is the attitude of a loving mother towards her child; such is the reflective-interpretive attitude of the socio-ethical-affective pedagogy.

Just as a mother looks at and regards her child with ineffable amazement, with the gratitude one has for an immense and gratuitous gift, so must the hermeneutic-interpretive pedagogy that chooses as its object of investigation the human person, seen in his or her inviolable uniqueness and dignity.

Just as the mother accompanies her little one little by little, first towards the attainment of the specific stages of each age of human development and then, year after year, towards full maturity, showing tireless, humble and discreet patience towards her child.

Just as the wise and loving mother corrects her child's mistakes from time to time, with wisdom and balance and without exasperation, preserving an unshakeable trust in the child's potential for human perfectibility, such is the attitude of socio-ethical-affective pedagogy.

It constantly observes, listens, speaks, delves into, reads and interprets the meaning of the events of daily educational practice, providing the pupil with all the necessary aids and practical and reflective tools to overcome the difficulties that often arise in the educational journey.

It accompanies human freedom towards the choice of the good

and the best and qualitatively improves interpersonal relationships and community well-being both inside and outside school.

Socio-ethical-affective pedagogy also supports the search for, and love of, knowledge and personal motivation, and enriches with experiential content, meaning and significance the set of institutional practices aimed at education, skills acquisition, education for citizenship and education for democracy. It guards, strengthens and defends these institutional practices, enriching them and sheltering them from the excessive formalism and empty notionism of many current educational contexts.

Socio-ethical-affective pedagogy is presented here through the metaphor of the school of dreams. The choice is motivated by the need to offer, through a symbolic transposition of images, a clear and simplified representation of a complex and articulated reality: that of today's school.

This school, faced with the undeniable richness of the educational offer and the means it has at its disposal today, needs to be renewed and transformed from the inside, i.e. '*ad intra*', in order to be able to respond to current human expectations and to the ethical, economic, political and, above all, democratic challenges of the contemporary world. The school of dreams is a school in which teachers and pupils are comfortable, and enthusiastically and assiduously strive every day to learn knowledge, sciences and techniques useful for a humanly, culturally, ethically, professionally and socially successful life.

The school of dreams is the place where, through loving and persuasive dialogue, trust, esteem, competence, professionalism, kindness and authoritativeness on the part of the teacher, one develops a love of study and achieves full emotional and reflective maturity to translate theory and knowledge into practical skills for individual and social life.

The school of dreams is the space where, through listening, confrontation with classmates, example given and received, uninterrupted service, curiosity, maieutics, *paideia* of virtues, disciplinary study of first-hand sources, educational play, sport, humanities, arts, cooperation, inclusion and acceptance of each individual, one learns the difficult and wonderful art of temperance, tolerance and faithfulness to commitments.

The school of dreams is the end and the means of an education system that, through breaks and full immersion, tests and qualitative evaluations, allows the talents of each for improvement without neglecting anyone.

It is an advanced pedagogical paradigm and an educational and political programme aimed at promoting the development of individuals and democracy in complex societies.

In a time characterized by an epochal and unprecedented educational and political emergency, affecting childhood, adolescence and adulthood and putting the future of society and democracy at risk, it is necessary to rethink schools and dream of a new school – at the service of the person, society, democracy, peace and their future.

The subject of this volume is the rethinking of schools and current education systems in order to build better forms of humanity, society, democracies and the future.

The title of the book evokes a new pedagogical paradigm and an ideal of a school free from the logics of the authoritarianism, efficiency and capitalist productivity of increasingly greedy, aggressive, competitive and opulent societies.

We would like a school that is cultured and specialized (but free from the empty erudition of the know-it-alls), soberly technological, but without the slavery of technology and profoundly human. A school capable, that is, of accompanying individuals towards intellectual, emotional, ethical, spiritual and social growth and towards the attainment of the most arduous, lofty and fascinating goal of culture and knowledge of all times: the integral conquest of the intellectual maturity of humanity by man and woman.

We would like to see a renewed school, no longer the servant of notions nor reduced to technicalities and knowledge of hard science, but profoundly humanistic, human and aware of its essential and original mission. A school *for* the person and *in favor* of his or her life: a resurrected and happy life with one's fellow human beings.

For this reason, aware of how different the current school reality is from this limited and problematic eutopia, we take back our intellectual freedom and the right to non-homogenization of thought

and culture and the right to dream of a different school: a dream school for childhood and adolescence.

In these pages, through the analysis of the new educational emergencies and the comparison with some cultural models that can inspire a renewal of culture and education, we propose the project of a better school: more suited to the individual, society and democracy. A school that is possible and very realistic based on effective pedagogical paradigms and on advanced, flexible, customised educational programmes, some of which have already been experimented in some Apulian schools.

It has already been partially tested by us in an embryonic and exploratory form through educational research conducted in the field in Italian family and school contexts, and now it could be implemented on a large scale in many educational contexts, with a scientifically sustainable and well-founded prediction of being able to duplicate the already obtained positive results.

The need to reaffirm the pedagogical primacy of the individual

We are living in uncertain and dark times in which the need to reaffirm the pedagogical primacy of the human being, understood in their dignity, uniqueness and inalienable freedom, is not adequately recognized and taken on board by educational theory. Yet, such recognition and taking charge seem to be the only paths still available to reverse the course of history, to rebuild individuals and society, and to save democracy from the risk of an imminent demise.

The reason for this lies in the interdependent relationship that links the recognition of the dignity and freedom of each individual to the political exercise of justice and of the right of peoples by a democratic state.

If, in fact, it is true that the citizens of a state cannot assume a civic identity and social habitus without an adequate and prolonged human and civic education. If it is also true that the creation of an honest, prepared, open and authentically democratic ruling class cannot take place without an adequate education, combined with an ethical and civic formation. It follows that it is fair to say that there can be neither a truly democratic state, nor virtuous and democratic citizens, without education and without the recognition of the dignity and freedom of each individual.

Now, as Brezinka states, there is no human life and education without values (Brezinka, 2011).

Since, that is, neutral and ambiguous education, the current one,

which leaves out any evaluation, does not help anyone in practical pedagogy, and we see why every day¹.

Since we also find ourselves in a time of plurality of values and nihilism², in order to provide guidance for practical education, it is necessary to rediscover the courage of a humble search for the truth of being and existence. Moreover, starting from this, it is necessary to morally expose oneself to re-edify the individual and society.

After all, as the German pedagogist states:

The way people lead their lives depends largely on the ideals they believe in [...] without ideals we would not know how to act, what to do and not to do, what to choose. Educational goals are ideals of personality, equally important for adults as for children and young people. (ivi, p. 67)

In view of this, in a time characterized by a profound crisis of the individual, societies and democracy, it is necessary to rediscover the essence of education, the primacy of the human person and the centrality of the human in the processes of education and the development of potential.

The understanding of the need to promote through culture and education these new pedagogical instances is linked to the realization that we are currently experiencing a crisis of the human being that is unprecedented in contemporary times. Understanding the need to advance through culture and the formation of these new pedagogical instances is connected with the realization that we are currently experiencing a crisis of human existence unprecedented for modernity.

The human has always permeated not only society, but also

- 1 That is, in the pedagogical sphere, we observe the educational failure of the younger generations and the consequences of an ethically neutral and value-free education.
- 2 It sometimes seems in the common mindset today that nihilism and pluralism of values are almost equivalent or tend to coincide in a strange way. In today's society, in fact, the dominant culture oscillates between the absence of ethical values (a nihilistic attitude) and an indiscriminate pluralism (a-critical pluralism) that asserts and claims as a social value any individual and/or small group whim. Faced with this apparent *aporia*, it is necessary to rethink education and promote a new philosophical-pedagogical search for the *verum*, preparatory to an ethical foundation of educational theory.

politics and law. In the constitution of democratic states, the human being is the criterion for measuring every power and every social activity. The universal recognition of human dignity and of a nucleus of inviolable, inalienable and equal rights for all human beings without any discrimination is an achievement, i.e. one that states have painstakingly achieved.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, represents the first act by which states recognize that rights belong universally to each person.

Recognition of the pre-existence of the human being, of the individual, that is, with respect to any other social and state organization, is the fundamental premise of democratic states and recalls an important theme that has occupied much space in philosophical and political speculation in the history of Western thought.

Man, according to the philosophical perspective accepted in democracies, is a holder of rights from birth. He finds his legitimacy not in a state or government that grants him rights, but in the individual himself, since personal rights are constitutive of the very nature of the human being and the human being comes first, i.e. is more important than any form of state.

Recognizing the primacy of the person, in pedagogical terms, means recognizing and 'taking to heart', through school and education, the universal principle of human perfectibility, to make the 'man-child' a masterpiece of knowledge, industriousness and humanity.

Recognizing the primacy of the person, in pedagogical terms, essentially means taking man in his entirety and his personal social destiny to heart, and striving through education, training and upbringing for the realization of the coincidence of each person's being and being-ness.

1.1 Who is the person? Towards an ontological rediscovery of human identity

One of the most sensitive and interesting witnesses and protagonists of the philosophical consciousness of the twentieth century who

questioned human identity and the concept of the person is the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005).

Already an orphan of war at the age of two, he soon touched upon the loneliness and horrors of war, caused by human greed, nationalism, revanchism³, the assertion of the desire for power, imperialism⁴, racism, the assertion of war ideologies, colonialism and the mutual hatreds of the peoples of the earth.

Mobilized at the age of 26 and taken prisoner in 1939, in the Oflag 83 camp in Wietzendorf in Lower Saxony, Ricoeur began translating Husserl's works into French, while experiencing at first hand the hardships of hunger, the painful life in the trenches, and the horror and violence of the massacres.

When, half a century later, in the book entitled *Temps et les* (1983), he stated that 'human lives need and deserve to be told [...]' and that 'the whole story of suffering cries out for vengeance and demands to be told' he not only manifested the need for recognition and reaffirmation of the dignity and worth of every human being, in the face of the horrors of recent history, but implicitly posed philosophical questions that had never been definitively resolved. Those questions were inescapable as regards human nature, existence and the destiny of every individual.

Such questions are essential both for understanding the extent of human actions and for attempting to remedy them through education.

This second aspect seems, to us, even more crucial than the first at a time when we find ourselves, vulnerably, faced with dangerous historical ebbs and flows.

The cogent and realistic questioning of what Hanna Arendt, at the end of the Second World War, called *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) presents itself with unpreced-

3 Desire for revenge (*revanche*, in French). In the period between 1870 and 1914, France, grieving over the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, increasingly cultivated and nurtured a desire for revenge against Germany.

4 Historically, it represents the will of a state to extend its rule and borders over ever-larger territories. Imperialism is essentially a politico-military determination of a state to disregard and violate the territorial integrity of other states.

ented topicality and seems to be the only way to access a deeper understanding of human nature and the interpersonal dynamics of individuals experiencing particular historical contingencies.

This question, from an ontological and hermeneutical point of view, is only highlighted here as central⁵ to both philosophical and pedagogical theory. It would in fact make it possible to understand and interpret not only human actions (which often turn to evil), but also the implicit motivations of the political choices of those in power and, together with these, current historical events and international socio-political controversies.

Faced, then, with the unravelling of the roots of evil in man, the theory of education could push forward and engage in a global project of education for the common good, democracy and freedom for the younger generations, so as to form better societies and build a better future for the peoples of the earth.

In this sense, we believe that schools can play a decisive political and social role through the education of the younger generations. Indeed, through the education and training of individuals, they have the power to awaken minds and consciences to the perennial problem and enigma of evil in man and history, and can reverse the course of history through the integral education of the person.

1.1.1 *The future of education and society in the rediscovery of human ontology*

In the light of what has just been stated, it is legitimate to think that the future of education and society may depend on a sort of cultural revolution, which puts the person, in the integral sense, back at the centre of the theory of human formation.

In other words, the future of society and democracy will depend on the ability of pedagogy to form wise, cultured, mature and affectively balanced and complete men and women, starting from the rediscovery of human ontology, that is, the constitutive dimensions of the human being.

5 We propose to return to the treatment of the problem of evil, from an ontological and hermeneutical point of view, in further detail.

To achieve this, today, on the threshold of a third world conflict and at the time of an 'armed peace' that could unpredictably turn into open conflict, one of the most important challenges for pedagogy is that of the courage to overcome the current notionism, formalism and cultural fragmentariness. This could help to confront some inescapable questions about the human person, which are necessary to be able to rethink education, training and instruction.

It is therefore necessary to start again from an original knowledge that knows how to combine and harmonize the different disciplinary contributions and combine tradition and innovation to achieve a new understanding of the human being.

Educational theory needs to pose some questions. Who is man? What is his intimate nature? What are his constitutive dimensions? Then again. What is the root of evil and all conflict? What can we expect from human beings? What, that is, are they capable of? Is there a way to curb their negative potential while developing the positive fully? These are the pressing questions that educational theory is called upon to answer.

Indeed, if we agree with what Ricoeur stated in *Histoire et vérité* (1955), it is 'truth' and, even more so, the search for truth that 'manifests the common being of philosophers', that is, their profound and always conscious attitude, their intellectual sensitivity and their feeling. They are not limited merely to the preservation of a historical memory of facts, or to the rational analysis of events, but call for a particular reflexive attitude that cannot but be assumed by a foundational phenomenological and hermeneutic pedagogy.

The careful thinker, says Ricoeur, does not pass superficially through facts, nor does he lose himself in them. He starts from the facts, that is, from the *hic et nunc*, and does not cease to interrogate them, developing an ever more accurate phenomenology and hermeneutics of the facts themselves, which saves them from oblivion and death and brings to the surface intentions and possibilities of response that their contemporaries had not seen.

Through this methodological process, a new piece of truth, essential to the understanding of existential phenomena and events, is often revealed (Ricoeur, *Histoire et vérité*, p. 56).

An icon – that of Ricoeur's careful thinker – that lends itself well to representing the historical role of a new pedagogical consciousness.

1.1.2 *Consciousness, subject, ego, person*

Several paradigms could be used to speak philosophically about the human being: 'person', 'consciousness', 'subject', 'I'. Of these, I agree with Ricoeur that the term 'person' is the most suitable to identify that attitude or entity «for which the notion of crisis is the essential reference mark of its situation» (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 28).

The universality of the notion of crisis, conceptualized in the works of Max Scheler, is expressed in the subject's conception and perception of himself. Contemporary man, in fact, perceives himself as a 'subject in crisis', a subject, that is, whose condition is that of 'no longer knowing his place in the universe'.

The universality of the notion of crisis implies that the subject perceives himself as a person «dismissed», «removed», that is, from a «task», an «office» that he used to have and that he no longer has, that is, that he «has lost».

Alongside this, the person, according to Ricoeur, no longer knows which stable hierarchy of values can guide its preferences, because the sky of fixed stars has become clouded over.

The third character of the attitude-person is that it is no longer able to distinguish friends from adversaries, since a dense blanket of clouds obscures the sky of relationships. The haze, then, is so dense that it verges on the limits of intolerability.

«In the crisis,» explains the French philosopher, «I experience the limit of my tolerance» (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 30).

Further on, 'these three aspects', Ricoeur adds, attest to the fact that the notion of crisis that characterizes contemporary consciousness 'transcends the economic, social and cultural fields. It is part of what might be called a criteriology of the person-attitude' (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 30).

Now returning to what we stated at the beginning of this paragraph, let us try to explain why, among the different paradigms introduced to indicate the human being, namely 'person', 'consciousness', 'subject' and 'ego', the first seems to us to be the best one.

Ricoeur states that, after the death of Mounier and personalism⁶ as a philosophical perspective, and after the crisis of the concepts of 'subject', 'conscience' and 'ego', the paradigm of the person is the most suitable to represent the condition of the contemporary individual.

Before explicating the theoretical and ethical paradigm of the person, it is necessary to recall the reasons for the crisis of the concepts of 'subject', 'conscience' and 'ego'.

For how could one 'still believe in the illusion of transparency attached to this term after Freud and psychoanalysis?' Alternatively, if one were to assume the paradigm of the subject, «how could one nurture the illusion of an ultimate foundation in some transcendental subject, after the critique of the ideologies of the Frankfurt School?» (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 27).

Thinking finally of the self, how could one, in this paradigm, identify the incipit of a new understanding of the human «in an ethics without ontology?» (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 27).

This is why, in the light of all this, it is possible with Ricoeur to affirm that the person is the best candidate for sustaining legal, political and economic struggles, and for founding, in our opinion, a new theory of education.

1.1.3 *The person in the anthropology of the Imago Dei*

Who is the human person? What is his or her ontological identity and constitutive dimensions? How is it possible to educate the entire human potential and all the spirit-body faculties of the human person? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to recall some philosophical definitions coined throughout history, by Western theoretical thought, and to recall how the notion of person, from a metaphysical, ethical and phenomenological point of view, represents an indispensable prerequisite for talking about being and existence.

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to recall some

6 These name echoes in 'isms' certain cultural ghosts of 20th century history that have become unacceptable.

philosophical definitions coined throughout history, by Western theoretical thought, and to recall how the notion of person, from a metaphysical, ethical and phenomenological point of view, represents an indispensable prerequisite for talking about being and existence.

Among the various philosophical definitions of person coined by Western thought, there are some, like Kant's, that emphasize the specific character of the individual's freedom and morality. Others, however, such as Boethius's and Thomas Aquinas's notion of person, emphasize the metaphysical aspect of the person, with which are associated the notions of 'dignity', 'absolute value' and 'unconditional respect'.

More recently, phenomenology, from its analysis of human phenomena, has come to define the person as a subject capable of performing acts of a 'unique' kind, characteristic of the human species. These acts are 'spiritual', 'endowed with meaning' and 'sense-generating', 'intelligent' and 'free'.

Within the phenomenological movement, the theory of knowledge coined by Dietrich von Hildebrand presents an original idea of the person, with qualifying characteristics characterized by a marked realism and an alternative to both the functional definition of the person coined by positivism and the abstract vision of the person of transcendentalism.

Von Hildebrand, through the analysis of human phenomena, arrives at a personalistic vision defined as the philosophy of love. For the German philosopher, the human person is characterized as a unity of intellect, will and heart.

In philosophy, there are various definitions of personhood, built on the notion of the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the human species. Among these, some emphasize precisely this notion and give the concept of person the definition of "individual substance of a rational nature". Others, on the other hand, emphasize the human characteristic of rationality/sociality and define the person as a 'relational being'. Some, finally, recall the metaphysical/phenomenological lesson and define the person as a 'finite being' and 'embodied spirit'. If we ideally pursue this last interpretative strand, we encounter a new and unprecedented idea of the person, specifically inspired by Christian anthropology.

The philosophical paradigm inspired by Christian anthropology gives the concept of the person a specific identity: the *Imago Dei*.

1.1.4 *The anthropology of the Imago Dei*

The Christian anthropology of the *Imago Dei* can make a direct contribution to solving the enigma of the origin and specific identity of the human person, proposing a comprehensive, inclusive and sustainable vision of the human, capable of integrating and harmonizing the different contributions of the various philosophical definitions and in line with the scientific acquisitions of the life sciences.

Recently, the International Theological Commission drafted a document⁷ entitled *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God* (2002), signed by the then Card. J. Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in which a relational – and even personal – conception of human beings is presented, in line with both neurobiological studies and contemporary psychological research⁸.

Christian anthropology identifies the *Imago Dei* as the heart and core of human identity. Man, according to Christian theology is created ‘in the image of God’. But that is not all.

In fact, the human person is not only ‘in the image of God’, but also finds himself, in his existence, in a vital and unbroken relationship with his Creator. And it is precisely this vital relationship with God that defines human beings and is the foundation of their relationship with other creatures.

The human person carries in the secret of his nature a reflection of the divine nature. This means that the *Imago Dei* is not only the

7 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_on_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_it.html (last consultation: 29/12/2022).

8 For more on this topic read: Brunetti, Brain, mind and consciousness, 2018 and Lambiasi & Cantelmi, *Psychology of compassion. Embracing and coping with life's difficulties*, 2020.

original and specific essence of each individual, but also the ontological principle of his perfectibility.

This perfectibility resides in the secret bowels of the human structure as 'original design' and 'potential' and is totally handed over to individual freedom and existential circumstances.

Human freedom can decide whether or not to realize the potential of perfectibility, which coincides with the *Imago Dei*, to the extent of the awareness that the intentional consciousness has of it and, at the same time, to the extent of the individual commitment and adherence that the will can give to the 'original design'.

Even Maria Montessori, in *The Secret of Childhood* (1950), speaks of an 'original project' imprinted in human nature; a project that can be developed or betrayed by the prejudices, misconceptions and erroneous behaviour of adults. Sometimes, in fact, adults misunderstand and betray the 'secret of human nature', i.e. the 'secret of childhood', with educational errors so pernicious that, if repeated over time, they can have indelible repercussions and deform the human spirit forever.

To touch a child is to touch the most sensitive point of a whole, rooted in the remotest past and reaching towards the infinity of the future. To touch the child is to touch the most delicate and vital point, where everything can be decided and renewed, where everything resounds with life, where the secrets of the soul are locked away, because it is there that the education of man is processed. (Montessori, 1950, p. XIII)

For this reason, says Montessori, it is necessary for the adult to transform and renew his or her mentality and to find within himself or herself the as yet unknown error that prevents him or her from 'seeing the child' in its ontological identity.

However, what is the unknown error that prevents the adult from seeing the child? It is the error of imposing, in the face of the simple, naked, essential and evident reality of the human being, one's own criteria and schemes of judgment, that is, one's own grids and mental structures, prejudices and everything that contributes to covering and concealing the objective and subjective reality of otherness, in all its spontaneous manifestations.

The unknown error that has already been committed in the past and that continues to be perpetuated in the family, educational and social spheres is that of not knowing how to observe the nature of the child in an interested manner. Moreover, it is misunderstanding that, in every human person there are ‘natural moral dispositions’ and ‘vital energies’ that can be traced back to an ‘original project’. The possible realization of that project is placed in the hands of the individual and of the community.

For this reason, Montessori states:

To work consciously for childhood, and to pursue this work to the end with the prodigious intention of saving it, would be to conquer the secret of humanity, just as so many secrets of outer nature have been conquered. (Montessori, 1950, pp. XIII–XIV)

And what is the ‘secret of childhood’, we might ask ourselves today, 70 years after Montessori’s discovery, if not the recognition of the original imprint of the Creator, that is, the *Imago Dei* present in human nature?

Recognizing this ‘secret’, with all its transformative significance, would mean initiating a true cultural revolution and founding a new theory of education enriched with a socio-ethical-affective valence. That is, it would mean taking seriously and embodying in current educational history the principle of the universal educability of the human person, considered in his or her uniqueness and unrepeatability, and laying the foundations for overcoming the greatest social issue of contemporary times: the current crisis of education and interpersonal relations.

Acknowledging and accepting what Montessori calls the ‘secret of childhood’ and what we call the ‘original nucleus of human ontology’ would mean being able to affirm that the individual and society can be infinitely better than they have been in the past and than they are at present.

It could be possible if only we began to take integral human education seriously and ‘to heart’. If only, that is, we decided to get schools out of the vicious circle of a sterile and incomplete training system that, at present, if one excludes the first grade of compulsory

education, limits itself to conveying only cognitive notionism, formalism and capitalism.

1.1.5 *The ontological pyramid of the human person*

We have just seen how the unveiling of the original core of human ontology, namely the *Imago Dei*, paves the way for a true cultural revolution. In that original core, in fact, it is possible to recognize the mystery of every being, willed, created, loved and embraced by God. In the acknowledgement of this mystery, moreover, it is possible to discover the full meaning of human existence and to focus on the starting point of every possible realization.

The conception of the human being as the image of God can be a guide for the relationship between human beings and the created world, and is the basis on which to assess the legitimacy of technical and scientific advances that can have, or have already had, a direct impact on human life and the environment.

The conception of the human being as the image of God also makes it possible to strengthen the epistemological architecture of other disciplinary fields such as the philosophy of law and to present with Josef Seifert the dignity of the person as the foundation of human rights.

If we now wished to proceed with a further investigative lunge into the mystery of the human person, useful for educational theory and its educational implications, we could make use of the phenomenological-hermeneutic lens and a novel image: the ontological pyramid of the human person (Fig. 1).

Paragraph No. 362 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church⁹ states that 'the human person, created in the image of God, is both a bodily and a spiritual being'.

9 https://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism_it/p1s2c1p6_it.htm (last consultation: 30/12/2022).



Fig. 1 - The ontological pyramid of the human person

In the human being, the relationship between interiority, the soul and exteriority, the body, does not reveal a material relationship between two realities but establishes an intentional link between co-principles: «We are body and soul together, not as distinct and only temporally knotted substances, but inextricably mixed with each other.» (Colasanto, 2021, p. 28)

It follows that the body is the content and the soul is the form of that particular being characterized as human. The form of the human being is rational, not merely vital like that of plants or sensitive in the manner of animals.

Indeed, it is characterized by the *logos* (reason, speech, discourse): ‘Every part, even the most insignificant, of a human being has the dignity of the *logos*, because the *logos* is its ultimate form. Every part enjoys the supreme dignity of the *logos*.’

And the *logos* has supreme dignity because it is a total or universal horizon of meaning.’ (Vigna, Zanardo, 2009, p. 6) These are the theoretical assumptions of the term ‘person’.

In the early centuries of Christianity, Severinus Boethius coined an original definition of person, imprinted in the pamphlet *Contra Eutichen et Nestorium*. This definition was very successful in the history of Western philosophical thought. The idea of a person as an ‘individual substance of a rational nature’ (*Ibidem*) influenced many later thinkers (III, 1–3).

Thomas Aquinas argued in the *Summa Theologica* that the term

‘person’ essentially means ‘that which is perfect in all nature, that is, subsistent in rational nature’ (I, q. 29, a. 3). In *De Potentia* he expanded on this concept, stating that ‘the mode of existence that the person signifies is very worthy, that is, as something existing in itself’ (q. 9, a. 4).

These definitions have affirmed in the history of Western thought the dignity of the person that manifests its nature as a ‘first substance’ and an individual (See Cicchese, Chimirri, 2016, pp. 419-420).

Such statements were used in the Middle Ages and the Modern Age until the advent of Descartes’ thought, which with the separation of *res cogitans* (thought) and *res extensa* (the body) generated an irremediable anthropological dualism and the crisis of the idea of the person.

With Descartes, the person, in its entirety, no longer existed and, with the exception of Kant¹⁰, from Descartes to Idealism only one functional aspect of the human person began to be considered: thought.

Subsequently, Hegel and nineteenth-century idealism downplayed the value of the person and considered human singularity as something ‘empirical’ (‘empirical I’), while true subjectivity (‘transcendental I’) became a kind of ‘universal soul’ of the historical-natural world. Several thinkers questioned this new form of dualism (empirical ego-transcendental ego). These included Kierkegaard and Marx.

In the twentieth century, a renewed interest in the person was established through Husserl’s thought and method. He affirmed the importance of the corporeality and the intentionality of the subject.

In this regard, Rubini states:

The German language uses two terms to indicate the body: *Körper* and *Leib*, with the former indicating the body-object, and the latter the body-subject, a psycho-organic structural

10 Only Kant re-evaluated the person from a moral point of view through the second formulation of the categorical imperative in the *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Habits*. He stated ‘act in such a way that you consider humanity, both in your own person and in the person of everyone else, always also at the same time as an aim, and never as a mere means’ (I. Kant, *Foundation of the Metaphysics of Habits* (1785), Rusconi, Milan 1994, pp. 144-145).

unity. In the latter sense, the human body is not an external object that can only be viewed from a naturalistic point of view and described by the experimental sciences. Instead, it is an internal, felt body, a subject that inhabits and constructs the space and time of existence. Therefore, subjective consciousness is 'intentional'. (Rubini, *The Art of Being Human*, p. 17)

Husserl's philosophy influenced Edith Stein's thinking. She suggested thinking of man as 'a whole, composed of a body that lives by spiritual breath and an embodied soul. In this perspective, our way of being in relationship with the other changes: touching the body of the sick person is one with touching the soul, because just as the pain of the body penetrates the soul, so the power of the soul overflows into the body' (Colasanto, 2021, p. 28).

Other reflections on the person have also been developed in the last century. Among the most interesting are the personalist thought of Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier. These authors vigorously affirmed the primacy of the human being over material needs and social and political organisms while also affirming the dignity and relational connections.

The same dialogical thought that had its greatest exponents in Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber pointed out that «the way out of the crisis – that is, the overcoming of individualism, collectivism, massification, so of atheism – can take place if man rediscovers his authentic relational being».

Inserting ourselves, ideally, in this line of thought, we can also affirm that the first dialogical and relational form that must be recognized and safeguarded is internal to the human person. It is, in fact, for pedagogy to recompose, through culture and education, the ancient fracture of the human person generated by Descartes (*res cogitans* and *res extensa*).

Contemporary Christian theology places the individual and his or her destiny of happiness at the centre of Christian experience and strongly affirms the need for an ontological reunification of the human person.

It consists of three dimensions (Fig. 1). The first is the body, a collection of apparatuses, proteins, enzymes and organs. The body

represents the base of the ontological pyramid of the human person presented through the image in Figure 1.

In the body, however, made of matter, of flesh and bones, there is an immaterial dimension, the psyche (in Greek), or soul (Latin). The body, that is, is animated by the soul.

The soul and the psychic life of man are a combination of affectivity, emotionality, rationality and will. These emergent and/or developed aptitudes or functions are the result of the compromise between an individual's rationality and affectivity.

The third dimension of the human person, i.e. the apex of the pyramid depicted in the figure, is the spirit, i.e. the heart.

Pope Benedict XVI defined the spirit of the person as the deepest part of man and the specific existential identity of the individual.

However, what is in the spirit? Christian philosophy and theology affirm that the spirit of the human person generates and elaborates the deep existential questions of the human being of all times: Who am I? Whence do I come? Where am I going? What is the meaning of my life? Why death? Who loves me? For whom am I worth?

Freud not only recognized the existential questions of the human spirit, but also highlighted their importance and drama. He asserted that when faced with a deceased person, one mourns not so much for him/her, but because in the deceased the individual sees his/her future reality with which he/she does not want to be confronted.

The spirit, said Pope Benedict XVI, is what remains of the ego removed, the culture, the masks, the passing emotions, the cultural and social superstructures, and the transient and contingent particularities.

The three constitutive dimensions of the human person are in a relationship of interdependence and intercommunication. For this reason, it is possible to say that the human person is a whole: an 'embodied spirit' or a 'body, animated by an intentional consciousness', a set, that is, of ontological bodily and more broadly spiritual dimensions that are inseparable, as the philosopher Edith Stein put it.

The experiences and personal development of a subject are also affected by the quality of the connection and interdependence of its

constituent dimensions; that is, they are affected by the harmony or lack of harmony of the constituent parts of the human being.

Sometimes, then, it is external events, especially negative ones, and interactions with others that generate inner conflicts and imbalances and alter the fragile inner and personal balance of the individual.

A slap from a father is not just a mark or a wound on the body; it becomes a wound in the soul. With a slap, doubts and conflicts about paternal affection begin in a person. The wound to the soul, then, if it goes deep and is repeated over time, can become a passing or sometimes permanent wound to the human spirit.

1.1.6 Agape in the educational relationship and excellence in teaching

If this is human nature, then the task of pedagogy, indeed the greatest challenge for pedagogy, is to 'care for', 'guard' and 'comprehensively form the fragile flower of human existence', at all stages of its development. A transient, precarious and vulnerable existence that always, inevitably, crosses the winding paths of adversity, pain and suffering of body and spirit.

Adversity and suffering that may come from within, or from outside the individual: from the environment to which one belongs, from the family, from the school and, more generally, from the unpredictability of the encounter with otherness.

The fragile condition of the human person and the contingency and precariousness of existence today demand a new cultural awareness on the part of pedagogy. The theory of education, in fact, needs to strengthen its epistemological status, drawing new content from other disciplines, in order to understand in depth and in an integral manner the spirit-body nature of the person and its laws of operation, even in complex situations.

Unfortunately, at present, it often happens that pedagogy still finds itself unequipped and unprepared to correctly interpret and understand the new problems of a relational and educational nature that beset the subjects of education.

Often, then, it seems that pedagogy renounces its own reflective and hermeneutic-interpretive mission and delegates its tasks to

others. This may explain the recent fashion for ‘psychologism’¹¹ and an ‘easy and sometimes undue medicalization’¹² of problems and manifestations of discomfort among young people. Instead, they are often specifically relational and educational in nature and, for this reason, belong to the pedagogical sphere.

The current frequent ‘latitude’ of pedagogy, i.e. its inexplicable absence, in the face of new educational problems is a worrying and destabilizing fact for schools and the training of the younger generations.

When there is a lack of teachers, parents and significant adults, that is, those capable of ‘really taking to heart’ the free, responsible and happy growth of children and adolescents, the problems multiply. Problems not only multiply and magnify, they sometimes radicalize in the human mind, to the point of medicalization. How often, in fact, does it happen today that parents turn to experts, mostly psychological, whom they ask to make up for their own shortcomings, or to remedy the errors of a deficient or non-existent family and school education!

How often at school, in relations with some teachers, or with children’s families, do we find ourselves faced with cases deemed ‘impossible’, which instead are nothing more than sad cases of relational difficulties of children and adolescents, attributable more to the ignorance and negligence of adults, than to the malice or hostility of the former?

When adults are incapable of listening, dialoguing, trusting, smiling and encouraging children, and when they are incapable of forgiving inevitable mistakes, working on the potential for human perfectibility, the integral growth of children cannot take place. When adults are unable to arouse and keep alive pupils’ curiosity

- 11 Current tendency of contemporary culture to identify relational and educational problems with psychological problems, which necessarily require the intervention of the expert.
- 12 An attitude that is currently widespread in industrialized and capitalized countries, which consists of considering physiological and entirely natural events, concerning the inner and spiritual world of children and young people, as medical conditions in need of diagnosis and treatment, leading to a rush to misuse or overuse health services.

and motivation to study and to reward personal efforts, pupils' moods and spirits drop and they often indulge in disengagement.

When, finally, teachers are unable to manage either groups or group relations, within a class, in complex and often changing situations, when they do not know how to promote healthy emulation, free from envy and rivalry, the school atmosphere becomes oppressive and unsuitable for fostering learning. When the teacher does not know how to remain calm and serene at all times (a genuine calm and serenity, not affected and full-throated, as Friedrich Fröebel suggested in his handbook on human education (1826)), respect, cooperation and inclusion become impossible. Thus, the many critical issues and problems of a school emerge. It is often misunderstandings, disagreements, and a lack of acceptance and trust that indelibly mark first the body and soul and then, deeply and silently, the human spirit of the little ones, generating tantrums and listlessness, sometimes considered inexplicable by adults.

Such facts, then, when repeated, create disharmonies inside and outside the person and weaken or even deform at times the intelligence, will and intentional consciousness.

When faced with bodily suffering, or with relational and moral suffering, first the face darkens and loses brightness and vitality. The darkening of the face is always followed by a whirlwind of negative thoughts that peep into the reason and hostile or demeaning emotions that make one lose peace. Negative thoughts and hostile or demeaning emotions are a sign that suffering has entered the soul. Sometimes, then, when the pain becomes prolonged, persistent and incomprehensible and remains without redress or redemption, it leaves indelible marks on the soul and penetrates to the point of division between soul and spirit, invading and poisoning the spirit.

How often are apparent despondency, distractions, demotivation and listlessness on the part of children and adolescents merely the external manifestation of simple or complex inner conflicts or dissatisfactions generated by misunderstandings and relational problems with adults or peers?

Even some forms of the more or less explicit transgressions of many of today's adolescents – what are they if not the concrete and tangible expression of a reiterated discomfort, experienced in the family, at school, among friends or in society, that has crossed the

thresholds of the soul to the point of touching the depths of the human spirit?

And how can a child who is undervalued, mocked and hurt by others be attracted by the disciplinary contents conveyed through a formal, rigid, notionistic, anaffective and sometimes even inclement school education if he has not first been loved, looked at, welcomed, listened to by his teacher, and guided towards the captivating and adventurous paths of curiosity and cognitive wonder?

If authors like Edith Stein spoke of the need for human beings to cultivate and utilise the virtue of empathy in relational and educational practice. If Dietrich von Hildebrand spoke of the philosophy of love as the foundation of a phenomenological, effective and realistically transformative personalism, then perhaps pedagogy should begin to include new formative themes in the school curricula of the new generations.

Evidently, an abstract, undefined, materialistic and positivistic-functional idea of the human person still prevails in contemporary times, which largely misunderstands and betrays the phenomenological, concrete and existential expectations of the human spirit along with its profound ontological nature.

This is why, while the ancient error of Cartesian dualism is perpetuated in schools and only the cognitive-rational and functional sphere of the individual is developed, young people seek other oases of understanding and happiness.

They, not being able to dialogue with the world of teachers and adults, increasingly take refuge in new sources of knowledge, the web and new virtual environments, to satisfy unanswered existential questions that the school cannot, or does not want to, answer.

The school, for its part, having dried up both the cognitive *eros* and the *agape* of its pupils, seems to close itself up day by day in an increasingly rigid, abstract and sterile formalism, the bearer of an increasingly radical educational crisis.

There are, of course, exceptions to this generalized situation. There are experiences of educational excellence, inspired by what Luigina Mortari defines as 'wisdom of education', but in this historical moment, these exceptions are weak and marginal and do not have a significant effect either in the pedagogical sphere or in the political and social spheres.

In the light of all this, we highlight the need for pedagogy to embrace the principle of excellence in teaching. Such excellence in teaching, which should be proposed and valued, combines an impeccable and always up-to-date scientific-disciplinary knowledge of the teacher with a sincere and growing educational agape.

Educational agape, however, cannot be improvised, but requires long and assiduous preparation on the part of the teacher and particularly excellent personal and professional aptitudes.

Excellence in teaching, then, coincides and goes hand in hand with a teacher's science and virtue, that is, with his or her spiritual and human progress, which is by no means taken for granted or of secondary importance

It is no coincidence that almost a century ago, Maria Montessori, who had already sensed this correspondence, recommended that teachers who were about to work in her schools should take care of their own spiritual preparation, because without mastery of one's own reason and emotions one cannot care for others.

From this discourse has developed the idea of the need for pedagogy to rethink the educational profession. Indeed, it is in need of a profound renewal, in the light of the rediscovery of human ontology, in order to be able to face today's complex cultural and socio-political challenges.

It is also important for educational theory to strengthen its epistemological status, rediscovering its alliance with philosophy.

In the current era of relativism, nihilism and sad passions, we hope, through the joint cultural commitment of pedagogy and philosophy, for a return of the person to the awareness of his or her integral being.

In other words, we hope for an ontological reappropriation by educational theory that highlights the inescapable need to promote, through schools, not only an intellectual and rational formation of the younger generations, but more broadly a socio-ethical-affective and spiritual one.

1.2 The crisis of education in the age of the Internet and social networks

It is possible to talk about education starting from two philosophical paradigms that enable interpretation of the fundamental character of today's society: the loss *of the religious sense* of man (Borghesi, 2015) and indifference or individualism, or postmodern «hyper-individualism».

These characteristics and, in particular, the first are certainly linked to the less intentional choice made by contemporary pedagogy to renounce research and propose a *possible metaphysical foundation* of the human being, which, moreover, as has already been said, would not be discarded even by the *hard sciences* and by neuroscience¹³. The effect of this renunciation is the fracture *between spirit* and body with the consequent loss of the sense of the *integral man* and the renunciation of investigating anything that is not directly attributable to a *computable physical element*.

Speaking of the paradigm of postmodern indifference, Bauman, a Polish philosopher and sociologist, considers individualism, or hyper-individualism, to be a characteristic element of the condition of contemporary man; it is individualism that has more accentuated and radical characteristics than modern individualism (Bauman, 2008). Furthermore, despite the fact that there are some processes that counteract the fundamental direction in which postmodern society is moving, it is not possible to hide the still minority and marginal nature of these processes, together with the difficulties and obstacles they encounter, and which slow down their emergence.

Nietzsche affirmed the ambivalent character of man. Indeed, he is not equally moral at different times of the day. He can be 'good' one moment and 'bad' the next. Such ambivalence, moreover, would represent a structural condition of the individual, i.e. a situation that cannot be overcome and from which it is not possible to escape (Nietzsche, 1993, 2012). Bauman, on the other hand, has a com-

13 Even neuroscience does not deny the existence in the human person of an immaterial quid that controls the brain (Eccles, *How the Self Controls Its Brain*, 1994; Brunetti, *Brain, mind and consciousness*, 2018).

pletely different idea and proposes the prospect of moral action as an antidote to current individualism. In a type of world that promotes and encourages selfishness and indifference towards others, according to Bauman, man, being free, can act against the tide. He states that in a society that “is not particularly inclined towards moral conduct, towards caring for others, both near and far, and therefore remains deaf to the spirit of brotherhood that is based on accepting mutual responsibility, mutual benevolence, understanding, trust, and solidarity”, it is possible to act differently and reverse the course of history (Bauman, 2007, p. 14).

The discourse on the pedagogical function that the recovery of the individual’s critical awareness of his or her own structural moral dispositions and functions can have is very useful in addressing the current educational crisis of the younger generations.

In postmodern society, behavioural experiences that can be traced back to the paradigm of difficulty and/or problematicness are increasingly emerging among young Italians and others.

The current behavioural drifts often encountered by the complex world of young people are, according to Bellingreri, linked to certain specific factors.

Postmodernity, in fact, is not only characterized by moral disengagement and degradation, but also by the loss of the sacred or religious character of life and, finally, by the individual’s withdrawal into himself (Bellingreri, 2014).

In the time of the digital revolution, the following would also be widespread among young people:

- a) narcissism;
- b) unconditional confidence in personal possibilities;
- c) paroxysmal defence of personal freedom;
- d) fracture between being and appearing (emphasized by an improper use of social networks).

Unconditional confidence in personal possibilities is one of the most obvious effects since the advent of the web and social networks. An analysis of social networks has shown that structure and *density* contribute to determining their potential usefulness to individuals (Granovetter, 1998).

Currently, young people, thanks to the advent of the Internet and the web, have endless opportunities to tap into knowledge – both general and more specialized knowledge. These opportunities, combined with the speed and ease of accessing, using and sharing information, can, and in fact often do, generate the ‘illusion of omniscience’ and a sort of ‘feeling of omnipotence’.

Web users, in fact, can be exposed to risk and encounter the phenomenon that interpretative philosophy calls ‘excess of ego’, i.e. a distortion of the intentionality of consciousness. This means that the intentionality of the subject’s consciousness could be erroneously and dangerously induced to believe that all that is knowable and usable in existence is ‘within one’s grasp’, with negative psychological and phenomenological repercussions.

The illusory absence of limits and prohibitions to personal freedom, produced by the advent of the web and especially by improper use of the web, cannot in fact exempt young and inexperienced Internet users from ambiguous and dangerous drifts.

Young people, in fact, much more than adults, may be mistakenly led to believe that they have, thanks to the web and social networks, unlimited opportunities for action and interaction with their peers. This is why they often underestimate the risks of misuse and abuse of such tools and the dangers hidden on the web and venture into ambiguous virtual environments, without wearing the reassuring armour of knowledge, prudence and experience and without confronting adults.

Moreover, if they are not educated and guided toward good use by adults, they may be led to believe that their field of action is infinitely extended by the media space. They may, that is, mistakenly believe that the space of media usability finally allows them to overcome the ‘Herculean columns of the human’, freeing knowledge from all prohibitions and taboos. Young people, who often want to imitate adults in everything and ‘cut to the chase’, see in the web desirable chimeras and boundless horizons of unexplored potential to which they can turn their curiosity. Such chimeras are desirable precisely because they are free of limitations and prohibitions, and because they are immediately accessible. It is enough to close the door of one’s room and escape the control and gaze of adults to have ‘all

the knowledge in the world' (or rather, what one mistakenly believes to be such) at the click of a mouse.

Their young age and inexperience make them fall into this deception and do not make them believe that the media illusion of an absolute and unlimited freedom can instead hide 'dangerous' and even 'deadly' ambushes for forming consciences and intelligences.

Indeed, there can be no authentic knowledge, nor formation and preparation for life, without the meaningful and significant mediation of an adult and without adequate experience, realized at the 'appropriate time'.

This is the teaching that the multi-millennial history of philosophy and the pedagogical sciences have handed down to us. Yet now, ironically, in the information society, such basic and essential educational notions, which represent the indispensable cornerstones of the formation of the individual and society, are currently no longer 're-acknowledged' and transmitted to the younger generations. It is not difficult to imagine the devastating effects that such an illusion can have on the human reason of a subject that is still forming and which has not yet reached full psycho-physical-spiritual maturity.

In psychological and pedagogical circles, there is increasingly frequent discussion on the negative effects of improper use of the web and social networks, especially among the younger generations. In particular, both the persuasive force that social networks have and the impact that the frequent search for an ephemeral inter-individual consensus obtained through the web can have on the human mind are being discussed. Among the pedagogically significant negative effects produced by the search for merely media consensus is the weakness of friendship and affective ties. Moreover, it seems that the web also has a performative effect on the human soul, to the point of orienting the existential choices of the younger generations towards attitudes and cognitive behaviour that emphasize the fracture between being and appearing (Cantelmi, 2013).

Tonino Cantelmi was the first Italian researcher and psychiatrist to study techno-addiction and the impact of the digital on the human mind. He argues that the digital revolution, inaugurating fascinating universes of knowledge and experience, is changing the register of our mental and sensory possibilities (Cantelmi, 2013).

Indeed, it is helping to shape a new culture and different forms and ways of feeling the relationship with oneself, with the other self and with the world (Cantelmi, 2013).

Because they are full of charm, these possibilities must lead us to perceive and reflect critically on their effects on psychic and relational life. The dynamics of real life can prove insufficient and inadequate for a life on the Net that is really all to be invented. Virtual communication is characterized by hypertextuality, hypermediality, high speed, substantial anonymity, identity games, overcoming normal space-time constraints, equalization of social status, access to multiple relationships, onset of unpredictable emotions, anarchy and freedom of transgression – extraordinary ingredients to transform cyberspace into a fascinating dimension of our own life. On the Net, therefore, it is possible to love, study, buy and dream; it is possible, in other words, to live. The characteristics of virtual communication can make the Network easier than reality, indeed pleasant enough to establish a kind of dependence. Some studies that I have conducted with the collaboration of many psychiatrists and psychologists indicate that 10% of navigators are exposed to this risk – a disturbing, and in my opinion excessive, fact. It is necessary to study this strange phenomenon of Net addicts when the Internet will no longer be an event but an inescapable reality (Cantelmi, 2009).

The *techno mediation* of relationships (chat, blog, sms, social network) that has been, for some years, the new privileged form of interpersonal relationship facilitates and develops the rift between being and *appearing*. The «connection», a newly elected form of interpersonal relationship, in fact, in addition to allowing narcissistic expressions of oneself, exalts emotions, *duplicity*, *provisionality* ambiguity and liquidity of human relationships that are now increasingly lacking guarantees of authenticity and durability.

The *ambiguous* and indefinable play of *identity*, allowed by *techno mediation*, that is, «the renunciation of identity and role in favour of an absolute fluidity of identity itself and roles, with the consequent renunciation of the responsibility of the relationship and its generative characteristics» (ibid.), produces a *deep* rift between the content and form of *being*. It is no longer important to build, through a self-educational process, a content that is equal to uplifting interpersonal relationships and useful to gain a «community form

of consent»; what matters in *social networks* is to «appear» interesting, attractive, open to every change, to gain approval, consensus and as many *likes as possible*, units of measurement of an *individual's* reputation, expressed through *techno-mediated approval*.

1.3 Socio-ethical-affective pedagogy begins with taking on the current existential degradation of young people

The last two surveys conducted by the IARD Institute on the situation of young people in Italy «at the beginning of the new century» reveal the anxiety and loss of young people in the face of profound social changes, which are the background to it and provide a considerable amount of data, which are particularly interesting for pedagogical reflection (Buzzi et al., 2002, 2007).

A trait that seems to characterize the profile of young contemporaries and that emerges from the most recent statistics is the lack of reference models and solid value anchors, and the «propensity to assume flexible identity references, combined with the certainty that there are no more qualities that are not transeunt, our physiognomy fragments rather into a thousand mortal souls» (Bellingreri, 2014, p. 14). Other traits (Bellingreri, 2014) that characterize the profile of young contemporaries are: *a*) a lack of stability in interpersonal relationships; *b*) difficulties in communication; *c*) a lack of shared languages; *d*) marked individualization; *e*) narcissism; *f*) paroxysmal defence of personal freedom; *g*) subjectiveness and misunderstanding of social norms; *h*) difficulties with parents and teachers; *i*) widespread social and political disengagement; *j*) a lack of guilt; *k*) a decline of the super-ego; *l*) a widespread aesthetic culture; *m*) a widespread hedonistic culture; *n*) attention to living the present moment; *o*) great confidence in personal possibilities; *p*) a lack of hope for the future.

The characters described appear the same as those recalled by Bauman in the concept of «liquid society» used to *describe the superficiality and liability* of human relationships. *Liquid* is opposite to *solid* and gives the idea of *instability, provisionality contingency*. The metaphor of liquidity expresses the precariousness in which we are immersed, with the increasing difficulty of *weaving* relationships

even *if only minimally authentic*, that is, devoid of *appearances, shielding* and *stability*, i.e. capable of resisting the «*trials*» of life and the wear and tear of time. The «*contingency*» of interpersonal relationships (ibid.) that is a mirror of a cultural change still taking place in which concern is attentive to, and respectful of, the other appears increasingly faded and disused. The other is not considered a good in itself, that is, an objective and substantial value with which it is possible to 'enter into a relationship', to pursue and realize the common good. He is often regarded as 'an object' and as 'something of little value, which I can replace with other things. The other is merely an object or tool that I can use if I «feel like it or need it», just as I use other objects or tools that are available to me. It matters little that in interpersonal relationships mutual trust is inhibited from the very first meeting, as is the willingness to forgive or disregard the frailties and mistakes of others, or that, precisely because of this, the scent of authentic and edifying friendships is breathed less and less frequently in cities that are now asphyxiated and chaotic, dominated by the cynical laws of interest, profit, judgment and prejudice, indifference, suspicion, convenience and haste.

Few still care what the «*contents*» of the dialogues between young people and adolescents are – such as the «*expressive and relational modes used in everyday life*»; such as the reference models chosen to make up for the loss of authority and significance of the nearest adults. Few care that the faces of young people are becoming increasingly hardened, dissatisfied and distracted. Few care to listen and give voice to the doubts, uncertainties and hopes hidden deep inside fragile, vulnerable consciences still in need of formation and positive experiences: those of young people. Few, finally, are concerned about the lability of youthful interpersonal relationships. Young people, in fact, with 'surprising lightness and speed', inaugurate and break, without any thought or remorse, affective and friendship relationships that would once have been guaranteed some form of solidity and duration.

Such behavioural attitudes clearly converge towards an experiential experience in which reference adults themselves have sometimes been bad role models, or failed to be role models for children.

Another conduct at risk of deviance among the younger generation in industrialized societies that is spreading widely and on

which, however, there is still no specific and exhaustive pedagogical literature is the new *habit of binge drinking* that Italy has also imported from the countries of northern Europe.

The overintake of alcohol (minimum six glasses in a row), aimed at a rapid achievement of drunkenness and generally practised at parties and often, even regularly, at the end of the week as boys and girls drink indiscriminately, without discrimination of class or social origin, is a serious threat to the health and well-being of the younger generations and represents a new challenge not only for the higher institutes of health, but also for families, for pedagogy and for the entire training system of the industrialized countries.

Voluntary and repeated drunkenness, mainly from beer, is used by young people to shock and feel uninhibited, fight shyness and feel great, to transgress and prove themselves to be strong, to show, finally, to their friends that they are emancipated and up to the situation. Being able to withstand a certain amount of alcohol has different origins and various causes. The first contact with alcohol in Italy happens by chance, often between the ages of 11 and 12 (as opposed to 14 in the rest of Europe), perhaps during a party among teenagers, on a school trip or in a trendy bar or disco. Accomplices, sometimes, are the discounted prices of drinks, very sugary and fruity, which hide the taste of strong liquors.

The effects on health are devastating, because a teenager's organism is still evolving, and alcohol slows down cognitive and affective development and exposes it to the exceedingly high risk of an *ethylic coma*. If initially voluntary and repeated drunkenness can give sensations of euphoria and well-being, it *then depresses and produces* in the young sensations of *emptying*, anxiety, sadness and continuous mood *swings*.

The phenomenon of «precocity» generally affects children and adolescents: everything is «consumed» early and very quickly. Alcohol abuse is not only earlier – we have cases of 11-year-olds – but also more extreme, more compulsive and follows methods and rhythms other than «classic» alcohol abuse: it is contaminated with substances, death-defiant behaviours and sexuality. Teenagers discover alcohol and use it as a «fuse» to ignite emotional explosions (the blast) and extinguish the anguish. It should be emphasized that up to the age of 15–16, the WHO advises total abstention from al-

cohol and therefore the precocity of abuse is to be considered a serious risk to the health of children. The northern European fashion of *binge drinking*, i.e. compulsive *drinking* without eating during night outings, to get the «blast», is intensifying. In addition, the ESPAD report shows that 42% of underage boys and 21% of underage girls drink only to get drunk. Is alcohol a dangerous fashion for *them* as, alas, there are so many, or is its abuse a symptom of deep *discomfort*? Alcohol abuse corresponds to two needs of the modern era: the need for «strong emotions» and the narcissistic push to challenge the extreme, in a logic of «grandeur» and «omnipotence». This is the psychological mix behind the rise in alcohol intake and *binge drinking*.

The need to experience strong emotions, *sensation seeking*, arises from the need to fight against an increasingly serious sense of emptiness that seems to pervade the intimacy of many teenagers. The narcissistic need to feel omnipotent stems from the increasing insecurities and uncertainties of adolescents without authentic external reference points. At one time, alcohol abuse was done by a mature person, often from a deprived social background. Instead, now, it seems that getting drunk has become a status symbol *among* so many young and very young people of the modern wellness society.[...] Alcohol consumption, used as a blast, often together with other substances and frequently, unfortunately, associated with extreme behaviours, is not linked to social discomfort, but to psychological discomfort, to the inner pain of *adolescents* forced to seek answers in an ambiguous context, where adults seem to chase teenage fashions or remain in bleak silence. In other words, it is not a question of poverty, but of pain¹⁴.

The scientist Tonino Cantelmi, who engaged for years in the study of a phenomenon that is now rampant, states (Cantelmi,

14 19 See. In Town: Alcoholism among teenagers – interview with Cantelmi, T(2011). <https://toninocantelmi.wordpress.com/2011/04/22/in-citta-alcolismo-tra-adolescenti-intervista-a-cantelmi-in-citta-alcolismo-tra-adolescenti/> (last consultation: 29/11/2017)..

2011a) that the new fashion of the wellness society is a symptom of deep discomfort and the inability of young *contemporaries to endure inner pain, opposition*, misunderstanding, disappointment, adversity of life – in a few words, the set of negative emotional experiences that, adequately lived, accompanied, decoded and interpreted, constitute the obligatory path of the individual maturing process. The congruence between the data reported by the recent international literature *on the theme of binge* drinking and the many years of *clinical* experience, added together with a team of health professionals committed to combating pathological addictions, directs the search for causes precisely towards the inability of young *contemporaries to endure inner pain*. Such discomfort, both widespread and misconceived, and sometimes mistakenly left out, raises unprecedented questions about the educational responsibility of formal and informal agencies:

Today's parents are affectionate, they love their children, they are blind, but they have given up educating, that is, to narrate themselves, to transmit values and ideas, to get involved in an authentic way. In other words, we are witnessing a terrifying silence of adults, their flight from educational responsibility, ambiguous and ambivalent choices. In addition, educational agencies, like school, seem overwhelmed by the education crisis. Therefore, the communities of children and adolescents build *techno-referenced knowledge* and learn to do without adults more fragile than them. We need to recover the courage of education, in other words we must think about schools for parents: in short, we must educate parents to be parents. (Ibid.)

The philosopher Michele Illiceto, committed for years to *the hermeneutic* and phenomenological understanding of *postmodern parenthood*, recently spoke of *the educational immaturity* of families (Illiceto, 2017), of *exorcising pain*¹⁵, of the epochal transition from

15 The will of a parent to remove at any cost, from their child, any painful and unpleasant experience, to give him only satisfaction, pleasures, and well-being.

an *ethical parenthood*¹⁶, that as of 30 to 40 years ago, for aesthetic parenting¹⁷ and the need for a new education in pain, which teaches true values and what really matters in life, through *witness*, the narration, that is, of truly lived experiences, with high educational and valuable content. The *Fathers, mothers, and children in a liquid society. Anthropology of Family Ties* (Illiceto, 2017), recalling Recalcati, states:

[...] love is not donating what you have, but it is donating what you do not have. The mother, that is, gives her lack. Here is the adult we were talking about above. The adult we miss. What does it mean to give the lack? It means saying, «My son, I can't give you everything, because I'm not everything, so don't get mad at the world if it doesn't give you everything.» We delude our teenagers when we make them understand that we can give them everything, and instead we know that this is not possible. When the child does not actually get everything they have been promised, that is what they will say. «Mom, didn't you say I could have it all and now?» The child, the teenager, will feel deluded precisely because he is disappointed. In addition, what are you going to do? He will take revenge on the adult who promised him the whole world, when he knows that this can never happen. Donating *the lack*, instead, prepares them for the loss and renunciation that, with sacrifice, they can later also fill. (Illiceto, 2017)

- 16 Typical of the edipic family, of authoritarian, transmissive, asymmetrical style, in which children were the result of a community expectation and in which education for sacrifice, generational conflict and asymmetrical confrontation between parents and children, constituted an essential moment in the process of maturation of individuals and, in which, the freedom of children was the result of a laborious conquest.
- 17 Proper to the current family defined as aesthetics, in which children are the result of a private desire, which sometimes coincides with a paroxysmal and unjustified defense of personal freedom, to the detriment of that of others and, above all, that of the weakest; symmetrical and permissive style; affective, narcissistic, in which roles are not quite distinct and, negative emotions are absolutely banished.

The phenomenon denounced in the latest United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report (2016) can also be read in light of the considerations just made. Cannabis continues to be the illicit drug of choice in Europe: around 20 million adults (15-64 years old) used it during 2016. It is estimated that about 1% of all adults are daily or almost daily users of this type of drug¹⁸. If you move overseas, North America (Canada) has the highest percentage, the sad primacy of adolescents (aged 10-12) who in the past year have used cannabis at least once (about 39%). This is followed by the United States with a 28% share of cannabis users and an age of 10 years. Italy boasts a sad percentage (11%) of cannabis users aged between 15 and 19, which is equivalent to saying that in Italy, out of ten adolescents between the age of 15 and 19, 1.1 used cannabis at least once in the past year (a far from insignificant amount!).

The high prevalence of the drug is also reflected in the number of patients undergoing specialist drug treatment. The total number of patients undergoing treatment for *cannabis-related problems* in Europe for the first time increased from 45,000 in 2006 to 61,000 in 2013, and the analysis notes that about a quarter of those undergoing treatment for *primary cannabis use* (23,000) have been reported by the criminal justice system (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), 2015).

A new confirmation of the trend, that of drug use, which is increasingly expanding, seems to come from the latest European Report on Drugs 2015¹⁹. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), which examines the new dynamics and dimensions of the drug problem in Europe and has 20 years of monitoring experience, has noted with concern the recent spread of unusual *habit loops*:

A number of European countries also report injecting Methamphetamine along with other stimulants (e.g., synthetic

18 An increase in consumption is observed in Bulgaria, France and four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway).

19 The complete package of the European Report on Drugs 2015 is available at www.emcdda.europa.eu/edr2015.

cathinones) among small groups of homosexual men. These so-called *slamming parties* are a worrying phenomenon due to the combination of risky behaviours related to both sexual habits and drug use. An estimated 2.1 million adults (15-64 years) have consumed cocaine in the last year, of which 1.8 million are young adults (15-34 years). After a period in which tablets sold as Ecstasy were considered by consumers to be poor quality and adulterated products, MDMA powder and high purity tablets are now more widespread (Cfr. the section on purity below). Synthetic cathines (e.g., Mephedrone, Pentedrone and MDPV) are now a constant on the illicit stimulant market, in some European countries, and are often consumed interchangeably with Amphetamine and Ecstasy. (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2015, pp. 4-5)

More and more frequently, the media is denouncing the worrying phenomenon of drug dealing at schools, made known by the account of some anonymous letters of complaint; it is a far from marginal, indeed widespread and expanding custom, which requires a new takeover of conscience, for a mobilization no longer deferred and for a synergy between *law enforcement* and *training agencies*.

Dear Director, I am a student at the Armando Perotti Institute in Bari. I write to you to denounce a very widespread and worrying phenomenon within the school: drug dealing. Last year, your newspaper wrote about several incidents that took place inside the institute's headquarters. That is why I am addressing you, with the hope that you publish my cry of alarm. Drug dealing takes place in the bathrooms of all the locations, from the central one to the branch, where many young people, from the first to the fifth year, come in to buy weed or smoke and until last year, there were cases where I saw cocaine sold. In those same bathrooms, you smoke those substances, as they are normal cigarettes. The drug dealers are 16-year-old boys, who also sell [...] outside the institute. In the school, they are all tired of seeing some people go back and forth through the hallways. There are too few searches carried out and, in any case, it is not known how, drug dealers learn about the day they take place and then arrive at school without substances on them. The stu-

dents, those who do not peddle and do not consume drugs of any kind, are calling for greater surveillance by everyone, starting with the manager and the professors. I thank all those who will listen to the words of a student who has all going against him²⁰.

Faced with social phenomena that are far from receding, it seems necessary to promote a solid human and *civic education*, based on an existential project and capable of activating and bringing to maturity the intentional conscience of individuals, the *true engine* of human actions (Bertolini & Caronia, 1993).

1.4 Advanced pedagogical programs for complex societies

It is not possible to design advanced pedagogical programmes for increasingly complex societies without taking into account the experience of the younger generations and especially their growing relational difficulties.

For this reason, we decided to talk about education starting from some statistics concerning mainly behavioural habits of pre-adolescents and adolescents. This allows us to trace the conceptual background for a critical reflection on education that intends to anchor itself to the concrete experience and existential experiences of contemporary young people.

The analysis of certain social phenomena that are spreading in post-modernity makes it possible, in fact, to talk about education from an objective critical perspective, far from abstract and idyllic theories on the world of childhood and adolescence and, instead, close to the implicit primary educational needs, the deepest existential ones. They struggle to emerge and we perceive their existence both indirectly and deductively, through the ontological study of human

20 25 Anonymous letter of complaint. See. <https://bari.ilquotidianoitaliano.com/sociale/2017/10/news/erba-e-cocaina-nei-bagni-da-spacciatori-16enni-lettera-denuncia-di-uno-studente-del-perotti-174467.html/> (last consultation: 7/12/2017).

nature (never definitively concluded), and empirically, through observation and listening to the experiences of the subjects of education.

If such a large number of adolescents and young people today claim to have relationship difficulties with adults and their peer group and, moreover, it frequently takes risky behaviours that undermine *one's welfare, health and* dangerously undermine the development trajectory *of one's success in life*, it is necessary to question the effectiveness and validity of our training systems and wonder how «effective» the educational action is compared to the original *mission* that, as Morin pointed out, is nothing more than *teaching to live* (Morin, 2015).

If pedagogical research has shown in many contributions that education must necessarily be linked to the project of growth and development of each individual, because of the central role it plays in relation to any desired social progress, which now lies in a global dimension, why, then, on balance, are the results of multi-annual educational action so *lacunose* on an ethical and existential level?

Franco Cambi, in analysing the contradictions of education in the modern world, uses three interpretative paradigms – in other words, three *pairs of factors* that seem to act in history with a dialectical tension and that are connected to planetary educational development: *knowledge and myth, violence and market, and care and rights*²¹. The first pair of factors is the resumption of knowledge and myths that have been produced over time. Knowledge and myth grew in the twentieth century until they became common conscience and «gave the myth a more social and cultural and less literary-ideal value». (Cambi, 2012, p. 14)

Freud and Montessori illuminated the knowledge of the world of childhood. For Freud, childhood is the root of the self, of its traumas, of the regulatory schemes inherent in the psyche (the Oedipus),

21 The current contradiction of education, according to Cambi, is intricately linked «to a dynamic of dialectical coexistence and oppositional tension, but also of critical integration that is divided into three pairs of asymmetric factors between them, but interacting and active at the same time everywhere in the world» (Cambi, 2012, p. 13).

of its existential history, and it is also the model of an otherness (the perverse and polymorphic eros).

Maria Montessori, studying through childhood the educational universe in a scientific and designed way, and discovering the vital *energies* of the child, together with the richness of *moral provisions* (Montessori, 1962), lays the foundations for an individual development that in terms of power is the driving force of the social and human development of peoples and that perhaps to date, after more than half a century, has not yet been understood in all its greatness.

The second *pair of factors*, violence and market, is actually an archaic and very modern paradigm at the same time, which has always served education, making it a slave to perverse logics such as human *arrogance* and *marketing*. In particular, referring to childhood, Cambi states that the second pair of factors «dominates it, exploits it, subjecting it to practices that distort it and stifle its needs and expectations» (Cambi, 2012, p. 14).

The third and final pair of factors, care and rights, in this period in vogue, according to Cambi, is linked and an educational theory and practice that protects education and initiates it «in the direction of a true democratic, egalitarian, tolerant and open society» (ibid.). Pedagogy, from this perspective, placing itself on this complex and subtle *dialectical frontier*, is called to play an irreplaceable central and planetary function.

1.5 Global-affective education: an accelerator of the higher cognitive spheres of the human intellect

However, the question remains as to whether the current educational theory and practice that protects education, that is, which is based on *the pair* of factors care and rights, and which, according to Cambi's perspective, initiates education «in the direction of a true democratic, egalitarian, tolerant and open society» (ibid.), is in fact realizing this utopia. The *national* and international social and cultural winds that blow on contemporary history speak of a planet *fragmented and torn by* deep struggles and conflicts and rather suggest a collective educational action that is still ineffective compared to the universally shared values of *justice, equality, democracy* and *peace*.

Why, then, is the shared commitment still not enough to achieve a successful human being and a truly democratic civil society, despite the fact that there are new *tools, tools of* a global scope, such as the *web* and new technologies of *digital mobility*?

The critical hypothesis that seems most worthy of consideration, and which could guide pedagogical research, is that the current educational theory and practice that protects education has not been able to comprehend²² *the properness* of education: *the vir*, for the ancients, that is, the human person in its entirety and uniqueness of an *incarnate spirit*. Deepening this idea, there is the assumption that there is a kind of narrowness in *the paradigm of the citizen* on which the protection of education is based and consequently affirms the need to expand the paradigm of the protection of education, understanding all *man* in his greatness, multiplicity, depth and unrepeatability, that is, in its exquisitely and authentically spiritual *dimension*. This is not a formal «subtlety» that only affects the *pedagogical logos*, but a crucial and *theoretically founded ontological issue*, which can decide the directions and outcomes of the training process, and from which should be «reconfigured theory and educational practice».

Before embarking on an anthropological choice full of consequences on the epistemological-phenomenological and political-existential level, it is appropriate to explain the reasons for this choice, advisable to overcome the philosophical paradigm of citizen. The anthropological perspective undertaken, marrying a broader and universal vision of man, interprets the *civis* paradigm only as a component, albeit relevant, of the philosophical paradigm of *vir*. There are at least two reasons for this. The first looks at the formal validity and content of the chosen paradigm. It is also empirically verifiable. If there is an *effect*, the subjective and intersubjective clues, or signals²³ of a stumped education, or *with deficits*, which fails, that is, to understand and configure in an orderly way all the existential performances of man and which does not know how to teach man to live well, obviously there must be a *cause*: an *incomplete* education,

22 To *take with you*, that is, to *take charge* of its totality and entirety.

23 Aggression, individualism, paroxysmal defense of personal freedom (Cantelmi, 2011b; Bellingheri, 1, 2014).

which moves from an incomplete knowledge of man. It is possible, therefore, to hypothesize the existence of a part of man, an area, that is, of *conjectured* development for nothing, or almost nothing, *invested* by educational processes that, at best, are designed to impact an individual understood as citizen and nothing more.

The presence of an incontrovertible effect: the current crisis of education leads us to critically consider the philosophical paradigm of citizen to deplete its primacy and to undertake a deeper knowledge of the human.

In addition, on a historiographical and legal level, it is possible to grasp the inadequacy and fragmentation of an incomplete paradigm, that of citizen, in which *human ontology and axiology* cannot be encapsulated.

The formation of a subject understood as citizen, according to the paradigm of ‘civic education’²⁴, that is, as a *citizen*, in the full sense of the term, that he must be educated to recognize himself within a community, to live relations in a «spirit of unity and communion», seems implausible without adequate stimulation of the *moral provisions* of the subject, which, as the Western philosophical tradition taught, starting with Plato and Aristotle, cannot be fragmented, nor disjointed, and which can be traced back to the unique *human spirit*.

The same fate is reserved for the intention to form a *citizen*, in the full sense of the term, capable of exercising his freedom in a democratic sense, according to the paradigm of ‘democratic coexistence’²⁵ and respectful of the dignity of others, according to the paradigm of ‘civil coexistence’²⁶. How can an individual achieve these goals without being trained in the school of the *paideia of virtues*, the only one capable of teaching man the true freedom that consists in the «ability to dominate one’s inclinations *to evils*»²⁷, which often

24 Established by D.P.R. 585 of 13 June 1958.

25 Established under D.P.R. No. 104 of 12 February 1985.

26 Introduced by Delegation Law 53/2003.

27 Evil is intended here in its opposition to good: as that which is harmful, inappropriate, contrary to justice, morality or honesty, i.e. that which is considered undesirable in some way and what contrasts with the realization of individuals and of the *common* good. Evil referred to human nature, in the

hinders personal human development and peaceful coexistence among individuals, according to what both the Western philosophical tradition and a *simple phenomenology of existence* can confirm?

Finally, how could an individual called upon to «assume» a «civic habitus», «a co-empowered democratic science», promotor of «universal citizenship», aimed at the common good and widespread exercise of human rights against any cultural barrier, ideal or real, according to the ‘citizenship and constitution’²⁸ paradigm, achieve all this if *homo homini*²⁹ *lupus*?

philosophical sense, can be corporeal, psychological, psychic, spiritual, individual, social and environmental. From the ontological point of view, evil transcends human nature and is associated in philosophy with at least one metaphysical and another moral meaning of varying theoretical depth. In order to deepen the reflection on the distinction between *good* and *evil*, in moral meaning it would be interesting consider the attitude of the contemporary individual. The post-modern era is torn by an increasingly paroxysmal defense of personal freedom, which makes the boundaries of what ‘objectively’ and ‘universally’ can be considered as ‘good’ for everyone. The culture of relativism produces disastrous effects from a pedagogical and social point of view. At present, only a weak education survives, based on an ethic that is now only formal, subjective, opportunistic hybrid and opaque, which is no longer capable of directing the younger generations towards the great ideals that can realize the individual, society and democracy. The Kantian definition of moral good, in the *Criticism of Practical Reason* (Kant, 1788) defined the moral good as *categorical imperative*, which can be formulated with the following principle. «Act so that the maxim of your (subjective) action can become universal (objective) law». In the doctrine of the *formalism* Kantian - morality depends not on the things you want, but on the *principle*; in fact, what you do is not moral, but the same action may or may not be moral, depending on the *intention* with which it is carried out. In the Italian language, to express the difference in the intention that moves an action, proposes two terms: *morality* and *legality*. The first indicates a formal and contention (i.e., with the intention) to a social norm; the second, on the other hand, indicates a purely formal adherence to a social rule that could be broken if the person were not seen by others, or did not face an administrative sanction. A definition of good, that of the German philosopher, which poses new questions and challenges to contemporary pedagogy.

28 D.lgs. n. 169 of October 30, 2008.

29 Literally, «man is wolf to the other man». On the history of this Latin expression, cf. Tricaud, 1st, F. (1969).

In other words, if in man, along with the desire for good, there is a natural instinct that sometimes results in an inclination to evil and lies, it is then essential to educate not only human intelligence, but also the passions and emotions. If that instinct cannot be definitively eradicated and can at times take over from human freedom, to the point of becoming explicit and repeatedly ‘overpowering one’s fellow human beings’, it is not possible for the individual to assume a civic habitus and an authentically democratic conscience without effective and prolonged ethical education and an integral formation of his person.

In the light of that awareness, it is possible to hypothesize that a *cause* of the failure to achieve some of the educational goals proposed by the philosophical paradigm of the *civis* and the paradigm of ‘democratic coexistence’ resides in the rift between *spirit* and body. That *is* particularly accentuated and widespread in postmodernity. Postmodern culture seems to involve to a loss of the sense of the integral man. Added to this is the refusal on the part of pedagogical knowledge to investigate, through the support of the other sciences, human ontology and everything that is not directly traceable to a computable physical element.

In other words, the failure of the pedagogy to seek the integral knowledge of man and a *possible metaphysical foundation* would have resulted, in recent times, in fragmentary and incomplete educational practices, unable to realize the original educational mission: *to teach to live* and generate a *successful human*.

What is the possible remedy? The replacement of the *vir* paradigm with that of the *civis* and the replacement of the latter, as a subset of the former, seems sensible when combined with a more in-depth knowledge of the human ontological structure and, in particular, of the active role that the mind, understood as a *spiritual* principle, plays at the helm of human actions. This knowledge could become *an incipit* for the development and implementation of a new model of pedagogy capable of stimulating the active *receptive premises* of the high spiritual faculties of man and, in particular, intentional conscience, to observe any answers.

1.6 Identity between the moral process of individuals and the growth process of democratic societies

In *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Dewey, 1920), Dewey stated that «when one understands the identity between moral process and growth process, formal and more conscious education of childhood will be seen as the cheapest and most efficient means of advancing and reorganizing society». According to Dewey, therefore, not only do non-computable human elements, namely moral provisions, acquire a particular value, but they also affirm an essential principle for pedagogy: that the process of growth is a moral process, that is, the identity between education and ethics. However, what is meant by moral *process*?

Almost a century after the writing of a work so relevant to human education, it is not possible to understand why, despite the fact that the training systems of industrialized societies have invested and still invest tangible and non-tangible capital in the intentional and more conscious formal education of childhood and adolescence, there are still no appreciable effects in terms of human advancement and the reorganization of society.

If this is the case, it is possible, then, that the problem resides in educational practice or, rather, in the *nature* of ethics *proposed* by Western education systems. An ethic, like Dewey's, without ontology and not based on categorical imperatives is always open to the *risk of continuous destructuring and renegotiation* of norms and values that undermines the validity and verifiability of a *theory*, exposing the subjects to the loss of an objective criterion of judgment with which to distinguish what is «right» from what «is not».

Fluid ethics, *without ontology, without categorical imperatives*, is an ambiguous, dangerous, unstable ethic, unable to build solid individuals and societies. It continually exposes individuals to the risk of «subjectiveness of norms» and relativism and prevents, with the same pragmatism, the knowledge of *the truth* and the verification of the validity of a theory through practice.

The failure to realize a new humanism and to reorganize society in a truly democratic sense constitutes an open problem for the philosophy of education and leads to in-depth questions about the relationship between education and ethics and the need to recover

from the Western philosophical tradition some illuminating «contents» and «theoretical paradigms» to reverse the path of peoples and begin a new *metamorphosis* of the conscience of individuals.

In recent years, an Italian philosopher and pedagogist, Luigina Mortari, has dealt with the ethical/educational relationship and in *The Philosophy of Care* (Mortari, 2015) has deepened her knowledge of the essence of human life, capturing some major characteristics of this relationship. Before mentioning the theoretical outcomes of her phenomenological philosophy of care that seeks experiential evidence, and which, through dense phenomenology, identifies some ways of providing proper methods of care, which if they were implemented through a new widespread educational practice could bring significant results with a view to the building of the human, it is necessary to clarify the concept of «ethics».

For Luigina Mortari, ethics are the very core or heart of the practice of care (ivi, p. 115). Ethics comes from the Greek *ethos*, meaning «character», «behaviour», «costume», «custom»; it refers to the study of rational foundations that allow human behaviours to be assigned a «deontological status», through which it is possible to distinguish them into «good», «just» and «lawful», compared to behaviours considered «unfair», «illicit», «inconvenient» or «bad», according to an ideal behavioural or moral model. Now, the ethics proposed in the essay refer to care and have education as their specific field of application. The ethics of care are based on the ontology of the human structure, which is different in character and degree of complexity from that of beings belonging to the animal kingdom. Human ontology is structured in such a way that the life of men «cannot flourish» (ibid, p. 11) without the care of others. However, although the cure appears as an essential *fact* and almost a vital biological *necessity* in the field of human experience, from the moment of birth, it is not excluded that this fact, so ontologically close, remains unknown in its ontological meaning, as Heidegger (Heidegger, 1927) had already warned. Such an eventuality would also explain the fact that although such care is essential experience and despite the fact that the term 'cure' is widely used, it does, in fact, lack adequately rigorous and perspicuous knowledge.

Luigina Mortari states that the lack of disciplined knowledge around care could be linked to ignorance about human ontology in

the postmodern era. Faced with the spread of increasingly refined and high-performing multimedia technologies, the *fragmentation* and specialization of scientific knowledge and the *multiplication* of curricular disciplines, the spiritual *bowels* of man and his intentional conscience appear more unknown than ever.

The particular merit of the ethical philosophy of care is twofold: on the one hand, it consists in having identified the «living nucleus», but *not* immediately evident, of care, a principle of transcendence that is structured in postures of being, on the other, in having identified a direction *of meaning* for education: the search for the common *good*. Using the phenomenological method, the philosopher is able to structure a descriptive theory of care, in whose heart a spiritual nucleus palpitates: the principle of transcendence³⁰.

«Speaking in phenomenological *terms*, the ways of being are the immediate phenomenal evidence of acting with care, which those who have care manifest concretely and which the other perceives in the heart of the relationship; while the *postures of being* are not precise actions those who care manifest concretely in the relationship with the other, but are like the ‘al-di-qua’ of the action and constitute the *generative humus* that prepares the action of care: they can be defined as transcendent phenomenal evidence, which are replied in the ways of being» (Mortari, 2015, pp. 115-116).

The procedural alternation between «manifestation» and «hiding», «form» and «content» reveals the *transcendent core of care*, which, «beyond» the recognition of a biological occurrence that would explain the origin of each other’s actions of care that «make» individuals, makes the human relationship of care properly «human» and, that is, «free, conscious, convenient to human anthropology and even disinterested and ethically founded» to guarantee the common good. The transcendent *phenomenal evidence*, therefore, constitutes the *true generative humus* of acting with care, that is, *the*

30 The term *transcendence*, generally used to indicate *what-is-is-al-of-there-of-the-self*, that is, the outer world and the inner world, which is then revealed to the conscience, is used here, according to the meaning indicated by Maria Zambrano who recalls the, *go beyond what is given*, i.e., *One leans on the other*. See Zambrano, 1996.

generative humus of the ways of being of those who act with care and also recall the content of the forms of *being*, that is, *the postures* of being towards which, as «hidden precious pearls», they are in fact buried in the humus of human conscience, inevitably postponing the concrete actions of «who-has-really-care-of the other» and «does not pretend to have». The principle of transcendence for Luigina Mortari is *the generative humus* that prepares the action of care and that makes the ways of *being* of those who act with care «re-explain», constantly referring to an al-di-qua of action, to a *disinterested* desire for good towards one's own kind. This desire, if freely supported by the human will, can result in a non-occasional exercise, but constant of care from which originates the progressively stabilized *embodiment of postures of being* there that, with a superficial look, in the interpersonal relationship the other may not grasp, but that in fact, as a «throbbing luminous body», in the wonderful experience of «witness», has the power to «ignite» in the existential space of one's own and others, «the desire for transcendence, that is, the passion for the further» (Mortari, 2006, p. 12).

Luigina Mortari's precious contribution originated from her sensitivity and from her ability to listen to the primary educational needs of the human being: the essential and original ones, linked to the concrete existence and the «ethical quality of this existence», which are still little recognized and considered by pedagogical knowledge. This contribution is most evident in having identified *a direction of meaning* for education. The sense of education lies, for the philosopher, «in wanting for the other the full actualization of his being able to be» and «educational practice can only qualify as an action designed to make the other sensitive to his call to be there, that is, to choose to choose, because living according to his choice has begun since Aristotle [...] is a necessary condition for leading a good life» (ibid.).

Education is therefore conceptualized as «a guided practice in the intention of offering those experiences that, on the basis of a rigorous theoretical investigation, constantly measured with the data emerging from empirical investigation, are suitable to develop in the other the desire for transcendence, that is, the passion for the further in one's existential space, which at one with making one available to the call of care» (ibid.).

In the heart of human care palpitates a *divine germ*: the principle of transcendence, the ontological foundation of the ethics of care:

Since not everything that is real is immediately manifested, it is also necessary to adopt the principle of transcendence, which requires you to let yourself be guided by the threads of evidence to go and grasp even what the mind immediately does not see. If you apply the principle of transcendence, you can go back to the living but not immediately evident nucleus of the cure, which is structured in postures of being. Speaking in phenomenological *terms*, the ways of being are the immediate phenomenal evidence of acting with care, which those who have care manifest concretely and which the other perceives in the heart of the relationship; while the *postures of being* are not precise actions those who care manifest concretely in the relationship with the other, but are like the 'al-di-qua' of the action and constitute the *generative humus* that prepares the action of care: they can be defined as transcendent phenomenal evidence, which are replied in the ways of being. (Mortari, 2015, pp. 115–116)

It is the *high and other measure* of the education of *the vir, of man*, who is understood in the classical sense as: the «complete man», «made of soul and body» and allowed to feel the responsibility not only of one's «quality» or «human connotation» of life, but also that of others. Finally, explaining the concreteness of the essence of care in another *education*, still possible in the planetary era, Luigina Mortari describes *the ways of being* of authentic human care as:

- paying attention
- listening
- keeping your word
- understanding
- feeling for each other
- being there with a distant proximity
- the use of delicacy and firmness
- the fatigue of exposing yourself to the other.

These are essential relational provisions within a vision that is not systematic, but that the author herself defines as «realistic and

empirical» (Mortari, 2015, p. 239), to indicate her «quality of attention» to reality. Moreover, the reality of human care is made up of unique and unrepeatable encounters:

I used to teach in a classroom before. As every morning, I would arrive at school so that the children, arriving with the school bus, would already find me in class. While I was waiting, there was always something to do. That morning I was busy writing a report. The children came and greeted me cheerfully. Alessandro, the smallest of the group, came up to meet me and said: «Hi teacher, I have an important thing to tell you». «All right,» I say. «I'm listening.» Alessandro begins to talk to me, meanwhile, continue to write the report. «Teacher listen to me!» «But yes, I'm listening to you, keep going!» In addition, as I say these words, I keep writing my report. Alessandro begins the story, but then interrupts; I feel his little hands on my face, he turns it towards him and says to me: «If you do not look at me it means you do not really listen to me. But the things I have to tell you are important.» He was right. «Of course I'll listen to you.» I put my pen on the table and closed the notebook. Alessandro started talking again while I listened to him with due attention. (Mortari, 2015, p. 219)

It is evident that the cure, according to Mortari, cannot be considered as a «system», an epistemological architecture, but rather as a *human* space of real attention and operatic dedication», specifically, required by the situation of a unique and unrepeatable encounter between two individuals, in which the best of man is required.

Continuing the theoretical itinerary outlined by the Italian philosopher and taking a step forward, we affirm, in addition to what the Veronese philosopher has argued, that from a pedagogical point of view, it would be ineffective and didactically ineffective, in terms of a hoped-for and increasingly defined theoretical and empirical educational system, to rely on the 'randomness and occasionality' of experiences of care capable of arousing or not a desire for transcendence. It is necessary to move from the level of feeling to that of interpretative rationality; it is therefore necessary to develop a pedagogical, innovative method, theoretically based on the knowledge of human

anthology and axiology, which knows how to teach the subjects of training the «authentic relationship of care», the one based on mercy, *benevolence* and *gratuitousness*, starting from «fortuitous» and «occasional» experiences for educating, but intentionally favoured by the wisdom and foresight of the educator. Indeed, it is necessary for the educator to know the directions of meaning of educational action and, in an ever deeper way, the human ontology and the laws of operation and development of the spiritual principle that moves the intelligence and intentionality of human consciousness in its historical becoming, in order to combine the action of care with the activation of those *receptors* that act on the next zone of development, that is, on the potential of human *perfectibility*, and makes it possible to set in motion the whole process of building human nature. This can really benefit both educational practice and pedagogical research. In fact, while recognising as real, authentic and particularly significant experiences at the educational level, both the ignition of the «desire for transcendence» and the «passion for the further», which are only experienced in certain care relationships and, in particular, in those described by Mortari's phenomenology, we consider it useful in the second place and with a view to consolidating a «realistic and empirical» vision, to operate a «decantation» of such experiences, in a critical-rational key. Educational theory, in fact, needs to strengthen its epistemological status by promoting methodologically grounded, systematic and multidisciplinary research on these new fields of investigation. In fact, only starting from a solidly grounded pedagogical theory is it possible to generate teaching practices³¹ that are consistent with theoretical principles and effective, marked by an authentic care for the human person.

31 We refer to teaching practices modelled on actions of authentic care. The action of *authentic care* is defined as a «human» action and, that is, «free, conscious, convenient to human anthropology, willing and even disinterested and ethically founded», in order to guarantee the common good and manifest the *transcendent phenomenal evidence* (Mortari, 2015, p. 28). The action of authentic care can be considered, in its own right, «educational action», since, although implicitly, it is driven by the intention of the good of others and, in the highest and perfect forms, aspires to the full actualization of one's own and others' «well-being».

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Transformative training theories and fields of application

The research of some relevant voices of contemporary culture, in the European panorama, seems to converge in a thematic itinerary that, for some years now, has been problematizing a pedagogical urgency: the need to renew education and to arrive at a new epistemology of complexity, starting from a theoretical activity on human ontology and promoting a new culture of transdisciplinarity, capable of rehabilitating knowledge such as philosophy and religion. These disciplines, despite having made a significant contribution over the course of a multi-millennial history, between lights and shadows, to the understanding and construction of the human being, are currently often regarded as ‘obsolete’ knowledge. They are therefore frequently undervalued, neglected in the scholastic training of the younger generations, set aside and relegated to the margins of contemporary pedagogical debate, due to the prevalence of a generalized empiricist and scientist cultural tendency, which tends to refute and undervalue everything that falls outside ‘objectively observable and empirical’ data. This dangerous cultural tendency totally devalues the human in its peculiar manifestations and expressions and wrongly attributes to the computer sciences and their methods the ability to solve all problems and satisfy human cognitive needs.

Such research has become an essential starting point for contemporary pedagogical research at a time of crisis of the Western model of the individual, since, by suggesting new ways of being attainable for a theoretical-practical rethinking of education, it fosters reason-

able hope in the possibility of building, for the people of the earth, a better future through education.

2.1 The theory of moral exemplars and its educational potential

The radical statement of human perfectibility, ethically, intellectually and cognitively, has in Aristotle its first great supporter, within a systematic and punctual argumentation aimed at clarifying the connection between the potentiality of the disposition to virtue (*hexis*) and its actuality through exercise and learning.

Having clarified the meaning of virtue within his lexical and conceptual system, Aristotle identifies two different types, the ethical virtues and the dianoetic virtues, whose substantial difference lies firstly in the content of the material object of the perfectibility dynamic, which bestows happiness, fullness and well-being, and secondly in the manner of their acquisition and assimilation.

If, in fact, the emergence in individuals of the dianoetic virtues depends on teaching and requires constancy of experience and study, but also of exercise for their strengthening, the emergence of the ethical virtues, on the other hand, depends on habit, on a kind of constancy in practice, to the point that the very word 'ethics' has its root in 'habit' (*ethos*).

The most immediate result of this conception of ethics, which differs markedly both from aristocratic morality, which considered ethical virtues innate, and from Platonic morality, which subordinated virtuous practice to theoretical knowledge, is that it opens up an educational space for the acquisition of virtues that departs considerably from the mere transmissive mode and puts into circulation pedagogical alternatives that will have considerable success in various later ethical systems.

If there is something innate at the anthropological level in the Aristotelian system, it is, on the one hand, the disposition to be taught, to learn through the acquisition of theories and study, and, on the other, the possibility of acquiring concrete practices through observation, repeated habit and habitual practice: in essence, we could say that what is innate for Aristotle is educability, human perfectibility. And in the free and always unprecedented space that is

determined between this innate and structural property, which we have called “educability”, and the determination of a specific virtue, the pedagogical proposal is placed, architected in an effective manner and tending towards happiness, but in full respect of the subject’s free will, which remains autonomous in the choice of tending towards virtue or vice.

In essence, we could say that what is innate for Aristotle is educability, that is, human perfectibility.

From this perspective, it makes sense to state that in the free and always unprecedented space that is determined between the innate and structural property, which we have called ‘educability’, and the determination of a specific virtue, the pedagogical proposal is placed, architected in an effective manner and tending towards the happiness of the person. A proposal of truth and happiness that must, of course, always reckon with, and respect in full, the free will of the subject, it remains ontologically autonomous in its choice to tend towards virtue or vice.

It is clear that a complete overlap between the pedagogical proposal and the subject’s acquisition of virtue may appear, at first sight, to be a utopian project, and in fact remains so for most educators.

However, it is believed here that such an approximation can be considered not only the horizon of signification indispensable for the construction of all educational, ethical, social and political systems (which need collective support and consensus in order to be legitimized, a circumstance that can only be realized in the pedagogical success of projects oriented towards the collective good and happiness), but something more.

We will try to explain this assumption both from a linguistic and hermeneutical point of view, and from an empirical and existential perspective. We stated earlier that a complete overlap between the pedagogical proposal and the subject’s acquisition of virtue, rather than being a utopian project, could be considered a eutopian project.

The apparent linguistic play between ‘utopia’ and ‘eutopia’ refers to the different meaning of the terms ‘utopia’ (beautiful and unattainable place) and ‘eutopia’ (good place). The word ‘utopia’ derives from the Greek οὐ (“not”) and τόπος (“place”) and means “non-place”. In the word, coined by Thomas More, there is originally a

play on words with the English homophone ‘eutopia’, derived from the Greek (“good” or “well”) and \neq (“place”), thus meaning “good place”. This is due to the identical pronunciation in English of ‘utopia’ and ‘eutopia’ and thus gives rise to a double meaning.

In the text the term ‘eutopia’ is used in its specific meaning of “good and real place” and is a figure of the goal towards which pedagogy can strive. Moreover, it is the empirical evidence of certain concrete facts that confirm the interpretative accuracy of our previous assumption. If, in fact, in the history of humanity there have been, and still are, men and women who have not only fully embodied ethical and dianoetic virtues, but have even done so in a heroic and exemplary manner, leaving an indelible memory in the collective memory, this means that there is in fact a ‘high’ and ‘other’ way of living human existence. Towards such a ‘high’ and ‘other’ mode pedagogy must strive, in the time of the pandemic, to build a better future.

Already Aristotle, in his time, had understood the cogency of a *paideia* of virtues, indispensable for the edification of the individual and society, when he stated that the intent of legislators must be to make citizens acquire good habits. For the Greek philosopher, the results of this process distinguish bad from good constitutions.

In the same way, admits the Stagirite, if ethical virtues were innate, like the technical and intellectual acquisitions required to build a house ‘well’ or to learn to play an instrument ‘well’, ‘one would have no need of teachers, but all would be good or bad craftsmen from birth’¹.

Now, the fact that pedagogical concern is central to Aristotle’s treatment is shown by the importance the Stagirite attaches to care on the part of those who exercise influence over the young. Indeed, he is concerned that parents, teachers and legislators not only know how to give rules, but put in place educational theories and practices “of a certain quality” that is essentially ‘good’. They finally, according to Aristotle, after being chosen and proposed, must take root in the habit of individuals, that is, in the *ethos* congenial to and appropriate for the development of a specific morality. Such conduct is not only

1 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1, 1103b 13-15.

useful for the development of the individual, but is also compatible with, and necessary for, the social life of several individuals within the community.

In this regard, Aristotle states: “So it is not of little importance to contract this or that habit immediately from a young age, but it is of paramount importance, or – rather – it is the decisive point.”²

The prominence of Aristotelian philosophy in the analytic context is now a given, with all its variants ranging from Hilary Putnam to Alasdair MacIntyre, but at this juncture we would like to highlight the return to Aristotelian virtue ethics proposed by American philosopher Linda T. Zagzebski (2017). She introduces a new normative and foundational declination, which does not involve aprioristic perspectives or even recourse to abstract concepts and ideas, which would risk becoming stranded in the urgency of addressing a philosophy of language upstream.

Zagzebski’s “exemplarist ethical theory” is based on a pattern of action that involves, first, the subject’s recognition of a particularly admirable moral agent by virtue of a kind of emotional attraction that it arouses. Second, it involves the activation of a cognitive mechanism, generated precisely by emotion, that leads empathically to a realization that the model is worthy of imitation. Finally, it triggers in the subject the motivation for action, that is, the activation of actual ethical behaviour.

The first step in activating moral action lies in the recognition of an admirable subject, which the author distinguishes from non-moral admiration, such as that of a sporting talent, for which training and a special physical structure are required.

Moral admiration is characterized by being an aspect of character that can be recognized through its concrete acts, i.e. through its being in situation. This specific trait makes exemplarist morality a model of a posteriori ethics.

Exemplarist ethics does not, like Kantian ethics, envisage a path whereby morality is the result of a priori knowledge, but is a matter of concrete exemplars that, through experience, the subject is able to recognize quite naturally. Following the emotional operation,

2 Ivi, II, 1, 1103b 13-15.

which has aroused admiration as the subject's affection for an exemplary model, a second moment triggers the cognitive recognition of the dignity of the imitation, provided that this imitation is within the reach of the subject affected by admiration, i.e. it is not an unattainable model in terms of its virtues and moral qualities. The third moment, finally, consists in the motivation to act in emulation, thus from cognitive reflection it becomes a stimulus to action, a concrete praxis that moves the actions of emulating the exemplary model.

In particular, for the development of our thesis and as a function of the presentation of the highly educational potential of the model we have chosen, it seems useful to turn to Michel Croce's reading of moral exemplarism. He, on the one hand, highlights the potential of the ethical virtues (Croce, 2017), and on the other reflects on the dianoetic virtues (Croce, 2018). They are resemantized and reinterpreted in the light of other analytical references and renamed with the expression "intellectual virtues".

It is Zagzebski herself, in fact, who suggests the developments that exemplarist theory can have both on the purely ethical side and on the pedagogical and educational side. This happens when the American philosopher cites concrete personalities that can be recognized as models of non-specific virtuous excellence. Among these she cites personalities such as St Francis of Assisi and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who represent the virtues of the ethical sphere, and others such as Socrates and Confucius, who represent, instead, the virtues of the dianoetic sphere.

If, therefore, at first, Croce (2017) attempts to show the implications, not without criticism, of the development of exemplarist theory declined according to the ethical virtues, in the second instance (2018) he seeks to investigate its implications in the sphere of the dianoetic virtues, defined and resemantized in intellectual or epistemic virtues. The starting point is always the transformative, practical, concrete potential offered by exemplarist theory, in which the author herself establishes a connection and a possible analogous development between ethical virtues and intellectual virtues, applying the same acquisition strategies from the process that starts from admiration and then ends in emulation.

Unlike saints and moral heroes, however, such as St Francis and

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, here it is a question of identifying what José Medina in *The Epistemology of Resistance* (2013) calls ‘epistemic heroes’, i.e. individuals who distinguish themselves by their ability to act in political contexts of great oppression and tenaciously succeed in resisting. The political value and moral stature of this dimension could lead to recognizing concrete figures such as judges Falcone and Borsellino, and Antonio Gramsci, but also theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, all of whom paid with their lives for their commitment against the Mafia, fascism and Nazism in the name of freedom and justice.

Moreover, if we were to integrate Zagzebski’s perspective of moral exemplarism with the specific ethics of responsibility outlined by Bonhoeffer (1969), we would still find ourselves within a model of situation ethics that is certainly of a distinctly Christian orientation, but which does not envisage a prior deontological theorization. The theory outlined by Bonhoeffer, in fact, envisages an ethics of taking on reality, in its entirety, with simplicity and prudence (phronesis), and in view of the possibility of discerning God in reality.

In particular, this latter possibility in Bonhoeffer takes shape from the cancellation of absolute transcendence, as a given acquired through kenosis.

Bonhoeffer’s specific epistemic heroism is, among other things, theorized programmatically with one of the four moments of his ethics of responsibility. The ‘vicarious substitution’ (Stellvertretung) is characterized by appearing, by presenting oneself in the place of others. It is the function of one who cares, intervenes, struggles and suffers for other men, emblematically represented by the figure of the father, the statesman or the manager, figures who are always being-for-others and who are worthy of being exemplary, because they manage to activate what he calls the ‘sequela’.

With the second moment of ‘conformity to reality’ (Wirklichkeitgemässheit), moreover, Bonhoeffer intends to express precisely that principle according to which action is not indicated in a meta-historical, eternal and immutable programme, but is defined from time to time in conformity with the facticity of the situation. In responsible action in the name of vicariousness, one does not operate by simply applying a norm slavishly, striving to adapt reality to predetermined and pre-packaged principles; if anything, it is per-

sonal conduct that must adapt to the reality of the facts with discernment.

Returning to exemplarist theory, there are several advantages to its moral and intellectual use in education. However, it works as long as the guides also show themselves as epistemic exemplars, i.e. intellectually virtuous, sensitive to the needs of others and endowed with a certain empathy, in order to understand the needs of the subjects, reaching out to them and establishing an emotionally and cognitively meaningful connection.

2.1.1 *Beyond the stereotypes of today's schools*

The biggest stereotype of today's schools is the belief that the only task of schools today is to provide pupils with a high level of education and to facilitate the development of those skills required by an efficient production mentality, that of industries, and by the new challenges of the labour market.

This stereotype produced by the disavowal of human ontology and the failure to recognize the irreducibility of the peculiarities of the human person to the logic of capitalist systems is producing a global educational crisis that seems unprecedented in contemporary times.

Today there is talk of a profound and unprecedented educational crisis, uncertainty and precariousness are in the air, and at school and in the family young people instinctively seek a significant and original adult figure who can support and guide them through difficult times and accompany them towards the attainment of a truly integral maturity.

However, teachers and parents are often much unprepared to perform a profound, essential and universal service that concerns their main 'educational mission'.

Although for years, pedagogical knowledge has shown that in the formation of a critical conscience, criticality, morality and personal accompaniment of the student cannot be separated, we are far from having translated such assumptions into good practices (Mollo, 2001).

The cultural reality of our time is still very fragmented and over-specialized in knowledge, massifying in behaviour and disorientating in values. It often proposes to individuals, as the only objective to be pursued, only formal and notional education, to the detriment of an integral human and cultural formation, suitable for developing balanced personalities capable of living a happy and fully realized existence 'with' others, that is, through active participation in the pursuit of the common good.

The proposal by pedagogy of such great, unprecedented and, at the same time, 'close' models of human virtuousness, such as the one presented, whose validity and authenticity may be increasingly widely shared, may perhaps prove beneficial in proposing a cultural awakening through education. Such an awakening, now indispensable for the social progress of peoples, may perhaps nourish in the younger generations hope for a better future and inspire ideas and concrete actions to build it gradually.

2.2 The French sociology of a global reform

The need for conceiving an epistemology of complexity open to *transdiscipline* and capable of grasping the *original* and essential mission³ of education, that is, enabling the individual toward the practical side of everyday life, is the dominant theme of the last essay written by Edgar Morin. He is one of the most important figures of contemporary culture; he dedicated to education some important reflections and suggestions that are very useful in the pedagogical debate, which we intend to recall here.

In *Teach how to live* (Morin, 2015), the French sociologist speaks about the education that really matters to the contemporary individual and that cannot be reduced to school instruction alone.

The title of the essay ideally completes a trilogy dedicated to the problems of education.

In *Teach how to live*, Morin returns to reflect on the delicate sub-

3 That is nothing but teaching how to live a good life.

ject of education and the fragmentation of knowledge that appears increasingly specialized and distant. He also reflects on fundamental issues that recall the original educational mission and pose uncomfortable questions to educators today.

Morin's philosophy of education opens the curtain on an increasingly complex, disoriented and contradictory society. It also describes new trajectories of development for an integral education of the human being in which it is possible to overcome the fracture between knowledge and life, between being and appearing. He calls for a new form of humanism, more in keeping with the intimate aspirations of each individual, achievable through education for life.

After *Morin* (Morin, 2000) and *Seven complex lessons in education for the future* (Morin, 2001), two essential references of contemporary pedagogy, the author deepens the theme of education and shows how *theory and praxis* are an inseparable combination on which it is appropriate to reflect, so that it *becomes* a categorical imperative of a new form of *education*. The main problem of education, in fact, according to Morin, consists in the need to re-establish a new balance between *theories* and practicality, in order to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge and thus recover a *holistic* approach with the sociocultural productions of man, such as to make possible a new human understanding of man and nature.

To this end, the philosopher affirms the need to overcome the ancient barrier that man has built between humanistic culture and techno-scientific knowledge. He makes it clear that this is not an academic issue, or a matter of conflict between different faculties, because at stake is the urgency of a new understanding that places man in the proper place of his own nature (Morin, 2015, p. 12).

This is the main theme of the first chapter of the essay and hence the invitation he makes to renew education, because, as long as the two shores of culture continue to be kept separate, making them rivals, it will not be possible to manage the repercussions of man's intervention in nature and the effect of the latter on the human community.

It is, in fact, a community of destiny, Morin recalls, that is about to become increasingly planetary, due to globalisation, involving not only human groups but also their relations with the planet and the entire biosphere.

Rousseau's *Émile*, a text in which the authentic and essential mission of pedagogy is recalled, provides the incipit to the French philosopher's theoretical reflection (cf. p. 11).

In the book, which inspired entire generations of philosophers and pedagogists, there is, according to Morin, the starting point for a new *pedagogy* and in it would be described the original purpose of the tiring educational task: "to live and teach to live" (ibid.).

Teaching, therefore, in this perspective, would not be aimed exclusively at the acquisition of purely *theoretical* and abstract knowledge, therefore unhooked from concrete life, but would instead be a valuable tool with which to translate the acquired knowledge into *actions* and *facts* of practical life. Remarkably interesting in our opinion and worthy of special attention in the current pedagogical debate is this brilliant intuition that Morin manages to grasp, skilfully combining the sociological analysis of the contemporary age, which knows how to recognize the limits of today's society, with the study of sources that have illuminated the past and that perhaps would be appropriate to rediscover and propose to the younger generations of educators.

A confirmation of Morin's working hypothesis seems to come from another great education expert: Dewey. Well known, in fact, is the lesson of the American philosopher who in *Democracy and Education* defined education as an ontological necessity of man, aimed at the same biological life and the conservation of the human species and consisting in the transmission to the youngest and most inexperienced the knowledge acquired by adults during the experience (Dewey, 1966). Again, theory and practice in the educational field formed a *unicum*. The split between the two existential dimensions, or cultural levels, began, according to Morin, in the contemporary age, and particularly in the nineties. In the time of pluralism of knowledge and cognitive *capitalism* (Fumagalli, 2002), which are certainly no strangers to the 94-year-old Frenchman, the Rousseauian and the Deweyan lessons, in what could undoubtedly be called *an economy of the conscious*, appear very topical in trying to stem *some of the drifts* of contemporary culture.

In the pedagogical novel *Émile ou De l'éducation* (1762), written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the author takes young Emile's life as a pedagogical model. His education takes place in contact with nature,

away from the influences of social life, with the help of a tutor and lasts 25 years. During these years, the preceptor takes care to calibrate the knowledge offered to the different ages of the boy.

The teacher also strives to keep any form of corruption away from the child, while applying a negative education and thus letting the pupil make his own experiences and learn only when he feels the need. This process will lead to Emilio's ability to perceive his own limits in a natural way.

During his adolescence, the teacher teaches Emilio manual work and, at the same time, imparts a cultural, religious and moral education. The preceptor's task will only end when he is convinced that the mature young Emilio can in turn be a good preceptor and role model for his citizens.

The peculiarity of Rousseau's novel and the cause of its great success lies in the fact that it is presented as a pedagogical treatise at a time in history when pedagogy did not yet exist as an autonomous branch of knowledge. The novel's originality also lies in the modernity of the themes it deals with, in the ideas and concrete advice it provides. These are useful tips for life and full of imperishable existential wisdom, which make the novel a prototype of a pedagogical manual, rich in themes that are still relevant today.

It is no coincidence that many thinkers and educationalists, even today, return to Rousseau's work and refer to this eighteenth-century philosophical-pedagogical novel in their work.

The philosopher Edgar Morin, for example, in the work entitled *Teach how to live*, recalls some passages from Rousseau's *Émile*. He remembers how the teacher says about his pupil: "Living is the job I want to teach him" (Morin, 2015, p. 11).

This maxim of Rousseau's, while appearing to Morin to be excessive and not entirely agreeable, brings the educator closer to what should be his main purpose: to help the pupil 'learn to live' (ibid. p. 12).

Teaching how to live essentially means teaching, primarily, a kind of knowledge that is also useful in practical life. The alternative, the one unfortunately currently in use in schools, is a type of notionistic education, useful for transforming the human mind into a repository of knowledge that increases human conceit and arrogance.

It is true that there are no universal rules for teaching how to live

life – life that for each individual is unique and unrepeatable. It is never ‘a life in general’ but is always ‘someone’s life’. It is made up of surprises and unexpected events, of joys and sorrows that sometimes pervade the soul of a subjective consciousness to the point of filling and overwhelming it, placing the individual in a state of profound vulnerability and disorientation.

However, according to Morin, the educator can and must help young people to “learn to live” (ibid.) a balanced and fully human existence, translating the knowledge acquired, in the practice of daily life, into a perspective of the economy of conscience (Rullani, 2004), understood not as cognitive capitalism (Fumagalli, 2002), but rather as an ethical economy based on authentic values (Arvidsson & Peitersen, 2012).

One learns to live, says the author, only through experience, with the help of one’s parents and educators, through books, poetry and encounters (Morin, 2015, p. 12). Thus, one learns better and better to orient oneself and to avoid or reduce, as far as possible, the inevitable errors and flaws in knowledge that can result in wrong choices, with unforeseen or unpredictable negative outcomes.

According to Morin, the teacher is primarily called upon to help students develop reflective capacity and to facilitate the process of learning life skills and competence.

Such learning is life-long, life-wide and life-deep, i.e. in a life-wide perspective, and realized in the plurality of environments in which everyday life takes place. The art of living, in fact, is the result of a complex balance that the individual can achieve by skilfully combining his own experience and reflective activity with the input received from parents, educators, culture and meetings that take place throughout life.

It is well known, and experience itself confirms this, that a ‘chance’ encounter with a good and humanly significant person can steer existence towards goodness and happiness. Encounters, that is, with virtuous human models, or moral exemplars, can orient an individual’s existence towards a fully realized human life, both socially and ontologically and more in line with one’s desires and expectations. In fact, even if such an existence should be studded with setbacks and difficulties and suffering, as is only natural, the individual who follows humanly virtuous models becomes capable of transcen-

ding himself and overcoming his own limitations. Indeed, he progressively develops his human potential and becomes capable of overcoming any adversity. Although at times he will test his resilience, or falter or fall, he will always then be able to get back up and start walking again.

This is why it can be said that a ‘chance’ encounter that becomes repeated or habitual has the power to imprint a specific direction on an individual’s actions. Even in the case of negative experiences, an unsuccessful friendship can lead a person down unexpected and dangerous paths that it is easy to stumble into even from such paths; of course, it is possible to come out, but by force of arms, without any certainty and with marks that usually remain indelible. In both cases, the developed reflexive capacity of the subject’s intentional conscience and the education received in terms of an ethical economy play a decisive role in the choices of the subject.

The refined and complex art of human life certainly cannot result in the mere satisfaction of instincts, nor can it result in the accumulation of knowledge, as if human reason were nothing more than a container to be filled in some way. After all, human reason alone cannot be the only path to the knowledge of truth. According to Morin, then, today we are witnessing a particular condition of post-modernity that does not help the individual on the gneoseological level and that makes human knowledge particularly fallible and uncertain. The overabundance of separate, dispersed and partial knowledge, Morin states, can generate confusion and dispersion and can become an inevitable ‘source of error’ (ibid.) for the human mind. The *problem of living* then becomes for Morin a *problem of knowledge* and the epistemological problem requires to be considered as a central and primary problem in the education “of the individual, of the citizen, of the human being” (ibid. p. 15) in the *society* of knowledge.

We live in a type of society that promotes knowledge in all its forms and with cutting-edge technological means, which were revolutionary and unimaginable until the last decade. *Digital mobility and* digitalization are now the privileged methods of social interaction and the only ways to seize all the opportunities offered by the new global markets. Platforms for the development of web and mobile *applications*, always *new* and better performing, are already on the markets of a *marketing technology* that reaches individuals of all

ages, cultures and social conditions, at any latitude of the planet, with far-reaching effects on which it is difficult to express an objective assessment. Lights and shadows unfold on an existential reality in which *man online* is increasingly *passive* and less aware of the effects, not necessarily biological, of the flow of information to which it is continuously exposed, with negative repercussions in terms of the development and use of its reflexive capacity that is as *sleepy or clouded*.

In addition to the overabundance of the flow of information that digital mobility presents to the individual moment after moment, forcing him or her to perform a tiring mental exercise of sorting through data to be ‘deleted’ or ‘saved’ in virtual memories that can be expanded (almost indefinitely), the French philosopher of teaching to live also criticizes the excessive fragmentation and separation of knowledge conveyed through educational processes.

“Our education,” says Morin, “as much as it provides tools to live in society (reading, writing, accounting), however much it provides, the (unfortunately separate) elements of a general culture (nature sciences, human sciences), however dedicated it is to preparing or providing vocational education, suffers from an enormous deficiency, as regards to a primary need for living: to deceive and fall into illusion as little as possible, to recognize sources and causes of one’s mistakes and illusions, to seek at every opportunity the most relevant knowledge possible” (see p. 17).

Later, analysing *the multidimensional crisis* of today’s society, the French philosopher states that “at the heart of the crisis of teaching there is the crisis of education”, motivated by the failure “in teaching to live” (ibid. p. 47). A panacea to all this is the reform of thought and *education* that the author vehemently proposes in the second part of the essay, as the only remedy for the current crisis of education, and to be an effective bearer, that is, of real change, “it should be thought not only at university level, but already at primary school level” (ibid. p. 80).

The most obvious embarrassment is the need *to re-educate educators* and the only way out of *this impasse* seems to be, according to Morin, the self-education of educators, which can be achieved by the use of *bona exempla*, drawn from the present and the past, which can certainly encourage intentional *conscience* to take *better action*.

This is a *bottom-up renewal* that can undoubtedly be initiated and give good results, even before the desired renewal from *above*, that of the institutions, is carried out.

On the other hand, “if interest and passion (Eros) are dedicated in many teachers of philosophy, history, sociology, these teachers could expand their culture themselves and establish organic links for common teaching, with teachings from other disciplines” (see p. 81). The aim of *the reform of education*, in fact, “which includes the revision and updating of knowledge” and “the exercise of psychic gymnastics of self-examination” (see p. 105), and which coincides with “the well-being of each and every one” (ibid.), requires a regeneration of Eros.

The teaching thus conceived, evidently, cannot be for everyone, but only for those who feel in their hearts the vocation to teach, for those in whom “Eros was present in the love for knowledge that they would dispense” (ibid.), together with the love for youth to be educated. Only men and women moved by such a strong yearning will be able to promote a *reform*, richer than a *revolution*, which is a real “metamorphosis” (see p. 107) of education and which may perhaps result in a new *humanism* of the third millennium.

2.3 The normative philosophy of education

Among the men and women of our time who, driven by a strong and far-sighted educational yearning, oriented towards the reconstruction of the human being, were able to devise and start in Europe a real “metamorphosis” of education, although still in *its dawn and embryonic stage*, Wolfgang Brezinka stands as the most important Catholic pedagogy of the living German language.

He, recognized internationally as the author of classical texts and for having published numerous volumes and essays, translated into 15 languages, has the merit of having investigated in depth the causes of the current cultural crisis of the Western world and of having grasped a particular trait of the current youth situation: the difficulty of making *relevant* choices, perceived by the subject as definitive or “irreversible”.

Brezinka’s theoretical contribution is not represented exclusively by the anthropological and sociological investigation conducted on

the current juvenile condition and described with an unusual methodological rigour and critical acumen, but by its meaning, from the phenomenological analysis on the ways of being and thinking proper to contemporary culture, described through some characteristic traits: *fragmentation, disorientation, insecurity, de-futurization*, crisis of axiological references⁴, absence of unitary interpretative schemes of the traditional *type, individualism, a-morality, nihilism* and *relativism*. In the face of all this, the courageous proposal of education for the authentic *good*, “in times of cultural change” or, rather, of cultural tourism⁵ and radical transformations that, due to their breadth and continuity, have profoundly changed the current society, stands as a prophecy of a *humanism* still possible in the global era. The way to realization is that of a new education in *values*, whose epistemological architecture is built on the foundation of irreplaceable educational primates: the natural family, with its anthropology and its history and communities *of faith*, with the richness of the heritage of tradition and customs that define the *identity* of a person.

The fruits of the research of the German-Austrian pedagogue have given rise to a decisive cultural awakening and a lively debate in the pedagogical field. Generations of students, including Italian students, have trained on his texts and in particular on *Education and Pedagogy in Times of Cultural Change* (Brezinka, 2011), and it is possible to grasp interesting stimuli to conduct a deep critical reflection on what education means “in times of cultural change”.

4 Judgment references that refer to a scale of values.

5 Literal translation from the original German «Im Kulturwan». It is contained in the title of the first German edition *Erziehung und Pädagogik im Kulturwan* (2003). That linguistic expression clearly highlights a specific socio-cultural attitude of contemporary life: the *cultural tourism*. It is a metaphor, which has not been adequately emphasized in the title of the Italian edition, *Education and Pedagogy in Times of Cultural Change* (2011). The title of the Italian edition highlights the idea of a frantic transition from one cultural content to another well. This habit has been produced by the advent of the web and prevents the subject from dwelling on cultural content in depth. Cultural tourism recalls the idea of the frenetic and superficial passage from one knowledge to another. A mostly notional and mnemonic knowledge that leaves no room for research or study of earlier sources, nor for a more wide-ranging and critical investigation.

Before entering into the understanding of a pedagogical text of particular significance, it is necessary to highlight how the main educational emergencies of contemporary society can be summarized in a single paradigm: the need to begin to seek the true good for man, the authentic and essential one capable of realizing the well-being of *Daisen*⁶ in the world, in every moment and existential condition, in an era, postmodern, that is very complex, but at the same time full of unprecedented opportunities.

The search for good, in fact, seems to be the appropriate response to the awareness that, if no one lives for himself, but is always related to *otherness*, to seek the existence of one's own and others, the valuable things that make it worth living, is an educational and cultural project that involves the intentional conscience of individuals in its intimate plurality.

Given the difficulty of thinking *about the good*, the problem cannot be overcome by avoiding confronting this matter to safeguard different perspectives of intercultural environments, but rather by reviving the awareness of the cognitive limits of human reason that make research never definitively concluded, and starting a multidisciplinary and multicultural investigation.

Now, ever since the problem of the search for *the authentic good* for the individual and the community, a *very complex ontological and axiological* question for pedagogical reflection, in postmodernity, several attempts have been made to circumvent the obstacle by remaining on a calligraphic level and decentralizing the attention of pedagogy, moving it, that is, from man to method, from the level of subjectivity to that of the instrument; this decentralization has repeatedly resulted in the relegation of theoretical *basal* issues to the peripheries of *pedagogical knowledge with the consequent retreat to the ontic*. In addition to the epistemological and utopian impoverishment, a depletion of the *logos has also been produced with the con-*

6 German term that can be translated as «being-in-the-world» It was introduced by Heidegger to indicate the condition of the individual, the «*be-there*». The word «*be-there*» does not indicate a mere spatial location of human being, but something more and complex. Rather, it recalls the way in which concretely and phenomenologically being is given in history.

sequent transcription of the educational reality into alarming *mechanisms and automatisms*, little related to the reality of vital inter-human relationships, not limited to rigid and asphyxiated conceptual schemes.

Wolfgang Brezinka, on the other hand, in contravention of the current tendency of contemporary pedagogy to be excessively unbalanced towards the observation of fragments of the *educational*, has relaunched in the pedagogical investigation an ethical and ontological approach through which it has been possible to recover an integral vision of man and whose results have resulted in the identification of a *new* way of rebuilding the human: education in values.

In *Education and Pedagogy in Times of Cultural Change* (Brezinka, 2011), the German pedagogist described the current society as being characterized by rapid changes, in which one certainly has more freedom and greater opportunities to *act, learn* and experience, but in which it is increasingly difficult to outline stable, well-defined and shared cultural and educational horizons on which to build one's unique and unrepeatable existential experience in relation to others. "Liberation from traditions, authority and social control over lifestyles", in fact, "also causes uprooting, isolation and lack of security" (see p. 9) and "all this weighs on adults and makes it difficult to educate young people" (see p. 10).

These are not abstract considerations unhooked from concrete reality, but the cognitive outcome produced by the meeting of *theory, life, studies and* experiences truly lived. During his long and prestigious academic career, Brezinka has constantly deepened educational themes in relation to the integral development of the person and their freedom, starting from the search for meaning that consciously or not connoted the existence of each individual and that is linked to human anthropology. "Not only that: educational criteria and pedagogy have always been studied by Brezinka also in close relationship with the evolution of society. All this, without ever avoiding and indeed seeking dialogue with the cultural trends, more or less innovative, that were born and imposed themselves in public debate and that entered into educational practices at school at every age group."⁷

7 From the text of the speech delivered by the Rector, Professor Franco Anelli.

As a student, he knew Nazism and its destructive power, and the weight assumed by totalitarian ideologies also in the deformation of educational principles. “In the first years of teaching he stayed in the United States measuring himself with another ‘way of life’, based on different inspiring criteria, with a vision of the world and of the person in which a certain idea of freedom is the focus of all choices and supports every theoretical and practical construction. These experiences, that together with the Christian faith and German Catholicism influenced by the thought of Romano Guardini⁸ have deeply influenced the spirit and results of his uninterrupted research.

The exhortation for the courage to *educate for good* is built on the idea that this occurs and becomes possible provided that a *human* counter-current and *professional* ethic is known and practised, based on stable values, capable of producing a *progressive humanization* of man and transforming his vision of the world:

[...] the courage to demand more from oneself and one’s way of life, living consistently according to the values that give meaning and stability to life, lasting joy, and consolation in pain. (Brezinka, 2011)

It is not possible to embark on the laborious path of self-transcendence without first placing yourself in a value perspective capable of *producing an expansion* of the field of view. In it, the subject can be *co-author* of his own laborious “worldview enterprise” that will be validated or denied in concrete experience. In order to carry

On May 12, 2014, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart awarded the *honorary degree* in Pedagogical Sciences to Professor Wolfgang Brezinka, Professor Emeritus of General Pedagogy at the University of Konstanz and authoritative member of the Austrian Academy of Science, www.cattolicanews.it/Anelli_Discorso_aa2013_2014.pdf. Last consultation carried out on 10/17/2017).

- 8 Presbyter, theologian and German naturalized Italian and writer of Catholic religion. Considered one of the most significant representatives of Catholic philosophy and theology of the 20th century, he was also called «Father of the Church of the 20th century». See Gerl-Falkovitz, H., & Gerl, H.B. (1985). *Romano Guardini (1885-1968). Leben und Werk*. Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag.

out the transfer of such theoretical and practical experience into the educational relationship, an educational style based on *entropathic*, a pedagogical technique aimed at grasping the worldview of others, will have to be adopted.

Just thinking of an experience of this nature, Romano Guardini says: “I would like to help others see with new eyes” (Guardini, 1994). The German theologian is aware that the beginning of an educational relationship capable of renewing the individual essentially resides in the replacement of the subject in a value perspective capable of mediating an *entropathic* experience that opens up his cognitive horizon on a *potential for perfectibility* that until then was unknown and unimaginable.

The process of de-building and taking on the value perspective of others in which a new possible vision of the world and of the successful *human* is contained requires a constant exercise *that unites faith and world, authentic spirituality⁹ and concrete life*. Romano Guardini describes this exercise:

[...] the continuous, so to speak methodical, encounter between faith and the world. And not only the world in general, as does theology when different problems arise, but in concrete terms, as in the case of culture and its manifestations, history, social life. (Guardini, 2004, p. 20)

In a passage *from Education and Pedagogy in Times of Cultural Change* (Brezinka, 2011), we read something truly relevant to the need presented by the German theologian to favour in individuals an expansion of the field of *experience* through *faith and the world*. It is capable of generating a new worldview and can carry out its *transforming* value with a view to a new humanization.

How people lead their lives depends largely on the ideals they believe in [...] without ideals, we would not know how to act, what to do and not to do, what to choose. Educa-

9 Progressive conformity of thought and action with the ideal model that for Christians is the *Christological icon*.

tional objectives are ideals of personality, equally important for both adults and children and young people. (See p. 67)

Listening, respect and care for tradition as stabilizing factors for the education of the new generations and as an essential condition to guarantee, together with the discernment between *good and evil*, the full maturation of the individual and the exercise of authentic freedom appear to be in contrast to the current vision of the world and culture. Tradition, however, is not to be understood here as an uncritical and nostalgic attachment to the past, but rather as a “legacy”, a common heritage of peoples and *universal knowledge*, hardened by history, from which it is possible to make the best of the sediments of human knowledge and practices that have followed each other in the evolution of time.

The exhortation to the courage to *educate* for good is *well combined* with an unprecedented theoretical boldness in an age of educational crisis in which the religious *sense*, in addition to being denied and unfaithful, is considered almost a *weakness* of human reason. This boldness goes so far as to affirm the need for educators to openly make and manifest their *anthropological* choice:

In a time of plurality of values and nihilism [...] to neglect evaluations, or to remain neutral as is used in science, would not help anyone in the field of practical pedagogy. There is no human life and education without values. Those who want to provide guidance aid for practical education must expose themselves morally. This, in pluralistic societies, cannot take place without conflicts. (See p. 143)

The awareness of being able to meet, in this moral exposition, hostility and misunderstandings is the price that you must be willing to pay, together with the effort and courage *to educate well*.

Moreover, if *posteritas iudicium*, that is, whether history will validate or deny such a theoretical approach that pursues practical educational aims, how can we blame such a utopia that pursues extremely high levels of human perfectibility from a community and universal perspective?

The words of Romano Guardini seem once again particularly ef-

fective to express an incontrovertible reality, based on which it makes sense to propose Brezinka's pedagogical perspective of tradition and values as a *way* of rebuilding the human:

The only model for successfully evaluating an epoch is to ask to what extent it develops and achieves an authentic reach on the *fullness of human existence*, in accordance with the peculiar character and possibilities of the same era. (Guardini, 1965)

Now, as it is difficult to assert the existence in postmodern times of such parameters and, in particular, of *human* and social success and a fullness of *human* existence, as indicators of educational effectiveness, in relation to the peculiar character of the time and the means at its disposal, it is necessary to conclude that we are still far from overcoming the educational crisis and that it is necessary to propose a pedagogical model of value *literacy*, as a still little considered and almost unexplored path of *humanization* in the global era.

2.4 Anglo-American Neo-Aristotelianism

Aristotelian and Tomist philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre is certainly one of the most original and interesting contemporary thinkers. In his work entitled *After Virtue* (MacIntyre, 1981) he made a decisive contribution to the debate on ethics in late-twentieth-century philosophy. By overcoming *contractualism*¹⁰ and *utilitarianism*¹¹, he has offered the possibility of a new ethical foundation for contemporary philosophy: the ethics of virtues¹². His contribution can be con-

10 Philosophical-political doctrine that identifies the origin and foundation of the state in the «social contract» or in other forms of consensus and pact between citizens and political authority.

11 Philosophical and ethical-political doctrine that established itself in England between the mid-18th and early 19th centuries. It lays the foundation of moral *utility*, stating that good action is the one that brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of living beings.

12 Inspired by the *doctrine of good* by Aristotle. According to the philosopher,

sidered an essential reference point for the current philosophical-pedagogical research with a view to a possible ethical *foundation* of pedagogy and a reform of education.

In the foreword to the second edition, the Scottish philosopher, recalling the other works written after the 1981 edition, and referring to the critical discussion that resulted from it due to the radical rebuttal of *liberalism*¹³, states:

[...] if there were good reasons to refute the core of the argumentative implant of *After Virtue*, I would have had plenty of time to identify them with certainty. So far, though, I have not found enough reason to abandon *the main thesis* of *After Virtue* – someone will silence me for this reason of an invincible stubbornness; whatever the judgment on my account, the fact remains that I have learned a lot in the meantime, integrating and modifying my previous thesis and arguments accordingly.¹⁴

Later, arguing his conviction of the inconsistency of the moral discourse of modernity, motivated both by a historiographical analysis in which he reconstructs the main stages of the change of mentality that has taken place in modernity, and by a philosophical-existential consideration, which explains the change, starting from the kind of life

«Aristotelian practical syllogism» provides an ideal model of action that can hardly be found in the modern approach to the ethical problem. Especially in the *pursuit of good* and the *practice of virtues* can become the foundation of a perfect society. In *Nicomachea Ethics* Aristotle claims: «We say, therefore, that the aim that is pursued in itself is more perfect than what is pursued for another reason. Moreover what is never chosen in view of anything else, is more perfect than the goods chosen simultaneously for themselves and for these other things», and in short, the perfect good is what must always be chosen in itself and never for something else (Aristotle, *Nicomachea Ethics*, Book I, Volume 7, 1097a-b).

- 13 Ethical and political conception of the modern and contemporary age that is expressed in doctrines and practices opposed to the *absolutism*, based essentially on the principle that the power of the State must be limited in order to promote the freedom of action of the individual.
- 14 Excerpt of the Preface to the second Italian edition of: MacIntyre, A. (2006). *After virtue, a quarter of a century later*. Rome: Armando.

that follows logic and is understood in the light of the concepts formulated by Aristotle, he affirms the need for an ethical *choice* that is now inevitable and improbable – Nietzsche or Aristotle – to overcome the *impasse*.

Moreover, in reconstructing the evolution of Western thought with regard to the ethical problem, MacIntyre states that in ancient times so-called ‘moral principles’ were originally inserted into a situation of practical beliefs and established ways of thinking, feeling and acting, which made them understandable, and that this situation, where moral judgments found a reason in reference to impersonal criteria “justified by a shared conception of the human good” (MacIntyre, 2006, p. 2), has changed.

Once the situation *and* justification had failed, because of the complex processes of social and moral transformation that occurred at the end of the Middle Ages and on the threshold of modernity, it was necessary to identify new paths of foundation and justification for moral rules and precepts. In particular, they had to be given a *new* statute, a new authority and a new justification.

Despite the fact that, since the eighteenth century, the moral philosophers of the European Enlightenment have tried to develop a *new ethical* status, the only result that has been achieved has, in fact, been a multiplication of rival theories. Now, since the moral culture of modernity lacks the resources that can advance it in its research, “so that sterility and frustration are the inevitable consequence with which it is forced to measure itself to come out of the impasse in which it finds itself” (see p. 17), this justifies the methodological choice to propose Aristotle’s thesis, later expanded and enriched by the reading of the *Theological Summa* by Tommaso D’Aquino:

St. Thomas made me realize that my attempt to explain the social good by simply resorting to a theory of society, in terms of practices, traditions and the narrative unity of human lives, would not be adequate until it was explicitly founded in metaphysics. Practices, traditions, and everything else can work, as they actually do, only because people have an end to which they move because of their specific nature. Therefore, I realized that, without realizing it, I had taken for granted the truth of something remarkably similar

to the doctrine of good that can be read in the fifth question of the first part of the *Theological Summa*. (Ibid.)

Following the reflections on Thomas's texts and comments on them by some contemporary Thomist scholars, MacIntyre affirms the need to overcome the rejection of modernity to consider and draw from the Western philosophical tradition and, in particular, from the tradition of virtues, arguing that the rereading of our past is necessary to understand our identity and our moral relationships today "in the light of a tradition that makes us capable of overcoming the obstacles that modernity, especially advanced modernity, imposes on such a knowledge of itself" (see p. 18).

In addition to the need for new *historical* research through which we can understand the *aporia* of modern culture and recover the *roots* of Western ethics, in order to overcome some drifts of postmodernity, MacIntyre states that *liberalism* is no longer acceptable, since "liberal political societies are by definition committed to denying any space for a non-conception of good in public debate, and even less can accept that their common life can be based on a determined conception of the good" (see p. 22).

This criticism of liberalism must in no way be interpreted as an indication of my personal sympathy for any kind of contemporary conservatism. Conservatism is in many ways the mirror image of liberalism that it professes to oppose. Its commitment to supporting a lifestyle structured by the free-market economy generates a destructive individualism in the same way as that of liberalism. Where liberalism has attempted to use the power to transform social relations characteristic of the modern state, favouring permissive laws, conservatism uses the same power to implement its intentions of coercion, enacting prohibitive laws. Conservatism and liberalism are equally opposed to the vision in *After Virtue*. (Ibid.)

Criticism of *liberalism* joins that of contemporary conservative *moralists* often responsible, according to MacIntyre, with their boria and dogmatism, for many of modernity's cultural dramas. Credible reference points, on the other hand, would be people who are also

humble and simple, lovers of true *good* and constantly searching in their daily choices for an *ethic* still possible in the global era:

The tradition of virtues resurfaces, in fact, periodically within daily life, in the lives of ordinary people who engage within a variety of practices, including that of putting up and supporting family and neighbourhood relationships, schools, clinics, and local forms of political communities. This regeneration makes ordinary people capable of questioning the dominant models of moral and social debate and institutions that find their expression in similar models. While I was writing *After Virtue*, I imagined people of this type, and even today I find with pleasure that they are the most suitable readers, those most able to recognize in the central thesis of the book the philosophical articulation of ideas that they had already elaborated spontaneously at matches from their daily life, the expression of the motivations that somehow already explained their conduct. (See p. 23)

The existence of these people can *reasonably* fuel hope for a better future and is, in fact, *empirical evidence* of the possibility of a *free* ethical foundation of *existence*, which we can no longer ignore if we want to rediscover the *roots* of a *successful human* being and a reform of culture and society, starting with education.

At the end of the essay, MacIntyre states: “[W]e are waiting for a new *Saint Benedict*” (ibid.).

For the Scottish philosopher, Benedict’s greatness lies in making it possible to establish a monastery centred *on* prayer, study and *work*, “in which and around which communities could not only survive but develop in a period of social and cultural darkness”. The effects of the Benedictine foundation and their institutional fallout thanks to those who in different ways followed its rule “were largely unpredictable for those times” (see p. 23).

The positive value of the Benedictine experience is grasped in a primary way on an existential level and, secondly, on a social and cultural level, as an unforeseen and unpredictable *effect of an archetype* of human renewal that, in a period of social and cultural darkness, could have indicated a new *telos* for the common progress of peoples and which, in fact, with the inestimable value of the witness of life, it was able to indicate.

Western monasticism inaugurated by Saint Benedict, in fact, had proposed a new model of human existence, more authentic, inspired by Gospel values, religious faith and consistency between the positive values of beliefs, tradition and life practices. It also indicated, in the Benedictine Rule, the way to achieve a possible balance between *reflexivity* and *action*, prayer and work, meditation and an *active life*, with which to overcome the excesses *and drifts recurrent* in its time, in one or the other sense.

In this religious and cultural experience of the first centuries of Christianity, it was not a cultural and educational programme that indicated a possible form of action but, conversely, it was the existential practice, that is, *the experience really lived*, otherwise defined as the testimony of some men and women¹⁵ that generated a spiritual and cultural renewal that fuelled and enriched reflection and cultural debate both in the secular and Catholic worlds.

The ultimate arrival of MacIntyre's ethical reflection seems to be the expectation of unexpected possibilities for renewal, through the work of one or more virtuous men and *women*, excellent and full of *faith*, such as Saint Benedict of Norcia, the Christian monk¹⁶ who in the sixth century A.D. gave rise to *Western monasticism*, a condition of religious life undertaken after the abandonment of *the world* and realized with the intention of following the Gospel teaching to the end¹⁷. It would soon spread to the Christianized West with unpredictable outcomes.

- 15 There was also a similar experience for some women. Among them was St Benedict's sister, Saint Scholastic, described by Christian hagiography as a luminous *example* by virtue and, in a particular way, by *charity* towards God and towards her brothers and sisters, in accordance with Jesus' precept of loving God and thy neighbor, by the high measure of his divine love (Jn 13:34).
- 16 From the Greek monakhós, Latin monachus, a derived name from 'mónos', meaning 'alone, solitary'.
- 17 Hermits (from the Latin éremos, desert), or anchorites (one who withdraws), devoted themselves to prayer and work and did penance, renouncing all comforts. Others, on the other hand, decided to distance themselves from the world and sought perfection in common life. For this reason they were called cenobites (those leading a life in common). The cenobites lived in a monastery and their day was organised and punctuated according to precise rules that established schedules and activities. The set of these rules constituted the Rule of the community and the monastery.

It is necessary, however, to correctly interpret the wish of the Scottish philosopher, so as not to incur gnoseological errors that are difficult to overcome. If one looks at it from the point of view of his anthropology, it will be easier to understand that he does not so much want human renewal through flight from *the world*, and the reproposal of the same implementing methods as the Western monasticism of the origins. His desire is directed, rather, towards the re-submission of the content of this spiritual and cultural experience. In fact, he hopes that the desires for renewal kept in the heart of a suffering humanity and the innovative experiences of the good *life* of some men and women of our time can find, in new charismatic *figures*, a way of formalizing and diffusing in the contemporary world.

Finally, the utopia of the English-speaking philosopher also seems to be directed towards the identification of a new Rule that allows, in the chaotic and fragmented postmodern existence, a new balance to be found between reflexivity and *action*, *prayer* and *work*, meditation and *active life*, to overcome the current aporia and drifts, which are perhaps comparable to those of the early years of Christianity.

The implicit reference of *After Virtue* to these instances remains an open and interesting question that merits further study.

2.5 Humanities and personal capability approach

In her book entitled *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010), American philosopher Martha Nussbaum speaks openly about what she considers a worrying crisis in world education.

A crisis that the American educator urges to be addressed with due care, as a failure to do so could lead “countries around the world”, as she points out, to form “generations of docile machines instead of full citizens” (p. 21).

To understand her thinking, let us consider some reflections that run through the book and lucidly describe the current cultural crisis.

In the first chapter, Nussbaum describes the silent crisis that has

gripped all education systems for some years now. It is, she states, a crisis of unprecedented proportions and global in scope: it is the world crisis of education.

The worst thing is that it is a crisis that goes unnoticed and works in silence, without the rulers bothering to look for and find solutions, like a cancer that in the long run, in a future perspective, could put democracy out of business.

Nevertheless, what does this worldwide crisis of education systems consist of? Moreover, why is it so dangerous for the future of democracy?

The worldwide crisis in education systems, according to Nussbaum, consists in having introduced into schools the logic of capitalist systems, i.e. the logic of profit, to the detriment of a human education at the service of man, social progress and democracy.

The danger of this worrying trend that is slowing down the process of humanization of man is that since schools are no longer capable of training thoughtful, aware and mature individuals, that is to say, full citizens, capable of thinking for themselves and understanding their own and others' suffering, then it is fair to say that if these are the men and women of the future, the existence of democracy is now hanging by a thread.

The preoccupation of today's education systems with training only competent, competitive and productive people, who are often indifferent and even individualistic and narcissistic, cannot but translate in the long run into a slow destruction of the human soul, imprisoned in inhuman and dehumanizing logics, with inevitable political consequences and a setback in the cultural and social progress of the peoples of the earth.

Nussbaum does not question, let alone deny, the enormous advantages and benefits that the so-called 'hard sciences' have made possible in the past and still make possible today. At most, she intends to recall the benefit, and the non-negligible potential, deriving from a balanced intertwining of humanistic culture and advanced scientific knowledge (taking into account how the latter fits into a system of knowledge that is constantly being updated and advanced).

Nussbaum also resorts to concrete examples, from which we can deduce the problems that a too extreme scientism is causing in some

specific contexts. The author dwells extensively on the situation in India today, and specifically on what she defines as an example of economic growth that is clearly doing very little for health, education (especially the humanities) and rural poverty.

“Without the contribution of properly educated citizens, no democracy can remain stable” (p. 28). To understand the general framework within which the arguments proposed by the author fit, and the relative political-philosophical thought that supports them, it seems necessary to recall the passage of the text in which the American philosopher explains how “[m]ost of us would not like to live in a prosperous country which however has ceased to be democratic” (p. 29).

This is the reason why, on balance, according to the author of *Not for Profit*, world education systems should be renewed by local governments and directed towards a logic that is no longer utilitarian and consumerist, but rather humanistic and humanizing, suitable for safeguarding and promoting the common progress of peoples and of democracy.

In an increasingly complex and critical time, in fact, contemporary man not only needs to acquire hyper-specialized and increasingly fragmented technical skills and practical-scientific knowledge, but also multi-perspective and multi-modal tools for understanding reality.

Therefore, while in the current and complex reality the tools of understanding are becoming increasingly poor and rudimentary, Nussbaum hopes for a new dawn of classical culture.

Obviously, it is not a question of discrediting scientific culture and technical culture, but of relaunching, together with them, access to a type of humanistic knowledge suitable for developing reflexivity, freedom of thought, critical rationalism, autonomy of judgment and individual talents. It is about relaunching too and a type of open, creative and flexible intelligence capable of defending and promoting the future of democracy, social justice and the common progress of the peoples of the earth, beyond the perverse logic of profit and the exploitation of the weaker by the stronger.

2.5.1 *The pedagogical theory of Capabilities Approach (CA)*

An education is only truly suited to freedom, says Martha Nussbaum, if it is able to form free citizens, who are free not thanks to their wealth or their birth, but because they are able to direct their rationality.

People's well-being is much more than a matter of money: it consists in the possibility of realizing the life projects that individuals are right to choose thanks to the abilities they possess. Hence the call for a new economy, an economy of human development, which has as its objective the promotion of well-being itself and the growth of growth, and which undertakes to evaluate pertinent alternative policies to the extent that they allow for the improvement of development.

It is a proposal that goes under the name of 'Capabilities Approach' (CA): a way of dealing with ethical-political issues based on development, and even before that on the possibility of living a dignified life for the individual starting from what is defined as capacity.

Capacities are formally defined as ways of acting, doing and being, which constitute human life and distinguish it from other real or possible forms of life.

Starting from the original and universal intuition of the dignity of the person as an end as it is nourished by the freedom of reason and respect for others (linked to belonging, and involving responsibility), we obtain the definition of the capacities and the subsequent internal distinctions between them.

A political-pedagogical perspective like that of Martha Nussbaum leads us to question some important contemporary educational challenges. Above all, there is the question of understanding how to exploit people's potential, through a school that is attentive to the individual abilities of the pupils. Secondly, there is also the matter of understanding, then also the possible social repercussions, in terms of community well-being, a pedagogical approach based on the development and strengthening of the subjects' capabilities.

The third question raised by Martha Nussbaum's philosophy of education concerns the implications of a "political" type – in the broadest sense of the term – that can be had if one decides to invest

again in the humanities and in the idea of a welfare centred on capability.

These are important and still open questions that can open up new educational scenarios and that represent an essential challenge for contemporary pedagogy.

Reflecting on Capability Approach and Lifelong Learning, on education for sustainable development and economic, global and transformative citizenship, means laying the foundations for a cultural, political and social revolution. Will that be the future of individuals and of education?

2.6 Capability Approach developments

The reflection conducted so far on theoretical models calling for a transformation of current education systems allows us to glimpse some possible cultural and anthropological developments arising from the assumption of such models.

Firstly, returning to reflect on the *climate of uncertainty and insensitivity of contemporaneity*, it is clear that pedagogy can no longer remain indifferent, nor avoid the task of developing a new *transcultural educational programme* that goes towards the sharing of a common project of *global citizenship*, supported by the values of a common ethic (Pinto Minerva, 2002).

Among the most ambitious challenges is certainly teaching *to live*, as Morin says, and recovering the positive values of tradition, *religiosity*, *cooperation* and the *care* of others.

Man ontologically is one being-for-the-other and is not able to live without the collaboration of others. As history has shown, any lack of cooperation between primitive men would not have made it possible to survive the roughness of the surrounding environment, and in the event of a lack of cooperation, even the construction of rural villages, an expression of a first voluntary social organization, would have failed.

Even the most recent neuro-scientific studies have now ascertained that humans are biologically “programmed” to connect with each other, thanks to *mirror neurons* that manage to make the feelings and emotions of others guessable in real time from an early age.

Even more recently, particular *brain nuclei* have been discovered that are useful for perceiving one's own and others' emotions and for managing affections: it is the *limbic system* and the *amygdala* that together constitute the nucleus of emotional intelligence.

The extraordinary ability of the newborn not only to get in touch with the other but also to put himself in *the shoes of the other* has recently been the subject of in-depth studies by two Italian researchers, Ulysses Mariani and Rosanna Schiralli, who, after reflecting on these attitudes, have described their effects in *The Emotions that Grow: How to Make our Children Autonomous and Safe* (Mariani & Schiralli, 2007).

For example, when trying to move your hands in front of the eyes of a newborn placed in a cradle, he will surely respond with a similar nod, stretching out his hands to greet. The palms of his hands are facing his gaze and therefore the little one, by imitation, should show the back of his hands. "The child instead *responds mirrored*, showing his palms and from this it is clear that he already has the ability to put himself from our point of *view*, adjusting accordingly" (Mariani & Schiralli, 2007, p. 27).

Similarly, if newborns spit out a parsnip and are scolded by their parents, they often react with a laugh, since they can already distinguish, *because of mirror neurons*, the non-violent intentions of their parents from those accompanied by genuine anger, to which they would respond instead with crying or fright.

Parietti studies such behaviours in the article entitled *Mirror Neurons, Empathy and Design. Designing interaction systems for the rehabilitation of children affected by perinatal stroke and their caregivers* (Parietti, 2015).

He states: "[I]f you highlight a deep link between motor functions and these superior functions, then it becomes clear how what underscores communication and imitation is that language consisting of the postures of our body, and the contraction or relaxation of muscles, including the smallest" (Parietti, 2015, p. 16). And even later, referring to the studies of Ekman (Ekman, 2010) and Rizzolatti (Rizzolatti, 2006), which observed how a part of these neurons that are activated at specific actions also responds to specific visual stimuli, that is, they activate even when we see something, it states that this means that the aforementioned neurons activate both at the execution of an action and at some objects. In particular:

[...] when through those objects we perform the action that they encode: the mere view of an object will then activate the same visuo-motor neurons that would activate the moment we wanted to grasp it. This is the explanation of how it is possible to interact with everything around us: there are neurons that relate objects to compatible actions to use them, whether the action remains in a potential state, or whether it is completed. [...] An object is perceived based on the physical qualities it suggests to a user, the appropriate actions to manipulate it, or *its affordances*. (See p. 109)

The activities that refer to the world of emotions, and to an auroral form of *visual* communication, already present in the newborn, according to recent neuron-scientific studies, also specifically challenge pedagogical research. It, traditionally engaged in the study, in an educational key, of the relational dimension of man, in some of its recent orientations is increasingly oriented towards the *use of the theoretical paradigm* of care not only to achieve a new ontological and phenomenological understanding of the human being, in line with the current acquisitions of the human and biological sciences, but also with the intention of designing, experimenting and spreading new practices of humanization increasingly widely shared.

The first studies on human relations that we considered date back to the 1950s. They attest that the child, having just come into the world, needs to feel the warmth of the mother's body, its scent and its reassuring presence, as well as needing the sustenance required for growth. According to such studies, contrary to what one might commonly think, the mother-child bond is not primarily related to the need to receive nourishment. In this regard, Harry Harlow, with a series of experiments conducted between 1957 and 1963, showed that *affective* need has always been more important than nutritional need. Using newborn monkeys as guinea pigs, he separated them from natural mothers to entrust them to two different types of surrogate mothers: the first, called a 'piece mother', was fluffy and warm but without milk; the second, called an 'iron mother', had a bottle for sustenance but the steel body was unsuitable for providing any kind of maternal warmth. Harlow's experiments showed that the monkeys preferred to spend all their time hugging their piece

mother, abandoning her for a few minutes only when the need to feed took over.

The affective need in humans is even more marked due to a qualitative difference compared to the lower species, gained in *the evolutionary* jump, and certified biologically by the presence of an *evolved neo-cortex* to which corresponds exponentially higher cognitive and affective performance (Eccles, 1994).

The newborn who receives care from his mother and, more generally, from his family will have to learn over time to become an adult able to offer others the same care and attention that he has received. Human care, however, unlike that of other living species, seems to follow a direction that goes beyond the instinct of conservation and survival and that calls into question a specific intention of *good*, proper to the wilful attitude of human self-conscience, true potential for human perfectibility.

Aristotle referred to *the human intentionality present in* the relationship of care when he said that those who care for the other are not making a *mechanical* gesture, in obedience to one instinct, but are “looking for something good for the other”; he intends, that is, to realize an *authentic* good towards others. The human aptitude for care would descend, according to Aristotle, from the ontological structure of man. The nature of the *soul*, constitutively present in the human being, makes *care* an explicit manifestation of a “tendency to good”, while the realization of *good* depends on the condition of the soul. The soul that lives according to *virtue* realizes the good towards which it is stretched and becomes capable of authentic gestures of *care*.

Virtue is a habitual disposition concerning choice, and consists of a behavioural posture that stays away from excesses. Virtue is not improvised or occasional behaviour but is the result of a constant exercise of *the psychic soul* that, through the use of reason, trains to dominate instincts and achieves ethical *virtues*, habits of behaviour or attitudes resulting from repeated practice. For example, *courage* is the result of a practical training of the *psychic* soul, which, under the command of reason, manages to control the opposing passions of cowardice and *recklessness*, and *progressively* reaches a *medium rate* in relation to the subject.

Traditional aristocratic morality held that virtue belonged by na-

ture to the nobility of the blood. Socratic-Platonic ethical intellectualism, on the other hand, held that virtue depended on intellectual knowledge and that it was sufficient to know the true good in order to do it.

Aristotle, on the other hand, believed, with a sensibility that brings him close to the current phenomenological paradigm of care, that the theoretical teaching of virtue literacy by the educator alone was not sufficient to develop virtuous ethical postures in the student. In the educational process, in fact, the fusion of intellectual knowledge and concrete experience is necessary for a virtuous behavioural posture to be generated in the educand. Only through a series of repeated efforts, initially strenuous and forced, does the will spontaneously turn towards the good, and acquire a moral 'habit', i.e. spontaneous and habitual virtuous conduct. It is precisely the experiential dimension that ensures that the ethics of *care*, according to the atypically Aristotelian vision, cannot be based on fixed rules or general precepts, since each relational situation has its own specific complexity. Moreover, if ethical action for Aristotle is aimed at seeking the good of the other and if education is also aimed at promoting the well-being of others, as well as every authentic gesture of *care*, then it is possible to affirm whether the practice of care, in order to achieve *one's* own end, can ignore *a paideia of virtues*; or that, in such conditions, the ethics of *care* assume the inestimable value of a highly humanizing practice.

By grasping the enormous educational potential contained in an ethic of *care* inspired both by the Western philosophical tradition (and in particular by Aristotelian ethics) and by the evangelical *morality* of the Christian tradition, contemporary thinkers such as Lobkowitz and Mortari affirm the now urgent need to direct pedagogical research towards a *new paideia of virtues* (Lobkowitz, 1983; Mortari, 2015).

In a society that, due to the current epochal crisis, appears increasingly torn and fragmented into an indefinable number of *shreds of humanity dispersed* in the almost invisible folds of everyday life, care as a humanizing practice and *virtue of mercy*, according to an expression recently concocted by the Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 1981), can reasonably fuel the hope of a reform of education, aimed at overcoming *liquid modernity* and the

recomposition of a new, authentically human face of man and *woman germinated* on the ashes of “old” nihilism and relativism.

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Chapter 3.

The school of dreams

3.1 Rethinking the school to build the future

The current school and educational crisis, exacerbated by the global pandemic situation and by the international political crisis, with the threat of nuclear war, poses unprecedented and urgent questions to pedagogy. What to teach? How to teach? Is an exclusively digital compulsory school incomplete and dehumanizing? And what kind of learning to think about or propose through formal school instruction?

These questions recall the depth and boldness of a theoretical-practical pedagogical model, oriented firstly towards understanding the school's current educational failures or shortcomings, and secondly towards the search for new educational strategies and frontiers. It is intended to pursue the aim of a substantial re-appropriation of the school's cultural and educational mission . The school of dreams is the new theoretical-practical paradigm that can illuminate the teachers' educational choices, in difficult times like the present. It is intended to inaugurate a new season and springtime of culture and schooling and a new humanisation of the individual and society. To achieve this, the new pedagogical paradigm proposes two lines of development of human potential. The first places the art of teaching and the professional and human training of teachers at the apex of today's cultural emergencies and teaching, in fact, is the great vehicle

of the global formation of the individual and society and can no longer be a professional fallback, but a passion and a vocation of the intelligence and the spirit. The second proposes the adoption of a new look at pupils. A gaze, no longer superficial and formal, but profound, reflective, I would dare say paternal and maternal, aimed at the globality of the pupil's person and the totality of his or her formative needs, which go far beyond the simple cognitive sphere.

The questions posed at the beginning of the paragraph express the idea of teaching as the art of learning, together with the pupils and the educating community. It can be realized by working, experimenting and continuously reflecting on the gaps and training needs of the pupils, as future men and women, as motivated and honest professionals and as citizens of tomorrow.

Initial questions, apparently distant both from the classic themes of pedagogical research and from those currently more in vogue, respond to a *founding* need in an ontological sense and an increasingly emerging logical phenomenon, which, supported by a renewed 'sensitivity' and pedagogical 'audacity', would perhaps allow us to approach those themes in a more conscious, prudent and didactically effective way. Furthermore, they appear specifically pertinent to recent cultural and social events and, in particular, the *shattering* of knowledge and cultural existential disorientation, which challenges *ad experimentum* new pedagogical-existential projects.

The indirect *criticism* as it concerns contemporary pedagogy is looked at as «content», «form» and the epistemological architecture of *conscious* destined to have a profound impact on human reality and socialness, by imprinting stable or semi-permanent development *trajectories* on minds and consciences that are difficult to deconstruct without resorting to adequate tools and concomitant *dilation* of the experience.

The genesis of the theoretical investigation undertaken is to be sought in the comparison and in particular in the 'imbalance' between the classical idea of education, traditionally understood by Western philosophy as a 'paideia of virtues', inseparably linked to the search for truth and the true good, animated by a desire for the perfection of man and all his faculties, and some recent statistical evidence on certain behavioural postures widespread in industrialized societies. The current youth situation also suggests there is a signifi-

cant educational and cultural crisis underway and a drastic reduction in human expectations to pre-social levels. From an ethical-value perspective, the current cultural atmosphere and the generalized existential behaviour of young people and adults point to a dangerous and worrying social condition. In fact, when virtuous models and value anchors disappear from the existential horizon of individuals, a dangerous spiritual regression of the human race always occurs in history. In other words, there is an adjustment of the civilization process of a people to the historical contingencies of the moment and a retreat of the cultural, human and existential development of people to levels that predate, chronologically, historically and socially, that phase of development. When the metaphysical sky darkens and values fall, the human ego regresses to a stage of prematurity and adolescence and human reason becomes clouded and barbaric, giving way to a proliferation of all kinds of passions and drives. In such a condition, the level of civilization of a people retreats to that stage of development prior to the establishment of social institutions that have taken evolved political forms such as democracy, and levels of human and social development are reached far below an optimal threshold.

With regard to this evidence, it was thought to propose a careful reflection and a self-critical examination both to pedagogy, understood as knowledge of education theoretically elaborated according to organicity and rational rigour, and to the practical-social knowledge of education engaged in the transmission of culture, languages, techniques, rules and myths of peoples.

In some surveys on the juvenile condition «at the beginning of the new century» (Bologna et al., 2015; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2015, 2017), a deep concern was revealed over the *sense of bewilderment* in the young generation, in the face of profound change characterizing postmodernity, and they provided a lot of data that were particularly interesting for pedagogical reflection (Buzzi et al., 2002, 2007). Perhaps the time has come for pedagogy to question itself and to carry out a courageous and conscientious *introspection* to ascertain «adequacy» and «contiguity» between the ends and means of education.

Are the aims, at this historic moment, inadequate to the expectations of human perfectibility or to the area of development of

man's extreme? Alternatively, are the means? On the other hand, are both?

Reflecting on some social phenomena that are becoming more and more widespread in industrialized societies allows us to talk about education from a historiographically founded perspective, far from both abstract and idyllic theories about the world of childhood and adolescence, both from the sometimes too «utilitarian» and «oppressive» needs of an articulated and complex school system in which the need to evaluate/measure the development of specialist knowledge and skills of pupils and teachers, according to rigid and dogmatic schematizations, arbitrarily assumed by the empirical sciences, is relegated to the peripheries of pedagogical knowledge and forces the primary educational needs of the individual into silence.

Becoming increasingly widespread is the need to take into account the mostly unexpressed «thirst» for knowledge that is useful for a dignified and happy existence with one's fellow men and the occurrence of references and «value anchors», which are indispensable in promoting an educational and existential planning in the long term, in which even suffering *and* failure, rather than being «avoided» or «banished» as «enemies» of a successful *human* being, are instead *welcomed* as essential moments of the training process and as a forced way to achieve full intellectual and existential maturity.

The history of Western philosophical and pedagogical thought inaugurated by Plato and Aristotle has never ceased to investigate, using different methods and purposes, human *ontology* and *axiology* to understand more and more deeply *the essence*, faculty and potential of human *perfectibility*, inextricably linked to the possibility of «self-affirmation» and «realization» of the individual in the time of existence.

However, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the advent of *positivism*, the philosophical and cultural French movement, which developed, not as a defined and unified philosophical system, but rather as a «climate» or a cultural «fashion» similar to the *Enlightenment*, whose unconditional confidence in science *and* scientific-*technological progress*, on which the social progress of peoples should depend, put a stop to metaphysical speculation, which is con-

sidered «useless and bogus abstractions» and has imposed its ideals of progress and liberation through scientific knowledge, to the point of *becoming* the predominant culture of the bourgeois class and strongly influencing the transoceanic European culture of the nineteenth century.

Despite its profound cultural impact, positivism ended up looking like a *new dogmatism*, which purported to clog man into the reductive schemes of scientific rationalism. Indeed, positivism, as Nicola Abbagnano said, soon appeared as a «romanticism» or an «idealization of science» and this justifies the massive «anti-positivist reaction» that characterized the philosophy of the last decades of the eighteen and early nineteen hundreds.

The new *anti-positive philosophies* are united by the strong opposition to positivism. In France, with Émile Boutroux, Maurice Blondel and Henri Bergson, the *spiritualist character* of philosophical thought has emerged, aimed at recognizing the primacy of *conscience* in the interpretation of reality.

At the same time, other currents of thought have established themselves, such as the *neo-idealism* of Samuel Alexander, Alfred North Whitehead, Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, who have reassessed the idea of history «as a sphere of freedom and spirit, and therefore of every moral value, compared to that of experimental science, as a sphere of necessity and nature, irresponsible and therefore free from values».

The heated *controversy between neo-positivism and anti-positivism* continued even after the Second World War, without ever reaching a resolution of the philosophical conflict.

In recent years, a widespread oblivion of being in favour of knowing, knowing how to do and appearing, even in the pedagogical sphere, inspired by neo-positivism and the methods of investigation of the exact sciences, and also linked to man's inability to overcome the inauthentic level of everyday life, has shifted the centre of gravity of education from an ontological and axiological level to an ontic one. The consequences of such a theoretical approach have not been long in coming.

The study of the sensory and neo-cortical functions of man, including in an educational key, enriched by the developments of psychology and biological sciences, has strongly unbalanced the

knowledge of the human on the «particular» at the expense of an integral and overall vision. Even knowledge of developmental laws on a more broadly spiritual scale has been called into question, and so it has happened that typically human dimensions, such as self-consciousness and the will, which, if properly developed, would act as a unifying, driving force and stabilizing centre in the individual, as shown by classical and more recent studies on which it would be worth reflecting, have fallen into oblivion, as if scientific studies had been able to demonstrate their non-existence.

In the highly neo-empiric and neo-positivist climate that is still being breathed in the industrialized West, despite the demonstration of the illusoriness of the unconditional trust placed in science that should have ensured the social progress of people, the word “metaphysics”, although relevant and useful for the integral understanding of the human being, seems difficult to combine with the current pedagogical reflection, committed to the challenges of contemporaneity.

The increasingly onerous institutional tasks and the challenges of a globalized and fragmented world, emergency problems that those involved in training are forced to face on a daily basis through the construction of indicators and methodological tools capable of “measuring” the educational phenomenon, prevent pedagogical knowledge from moving towards the theoretical and practical research of what would be truly useful and essential for the development of every human potential and beneficial for the construction of more just and supportive societies. In this direction, wanting to make a new contribution to the current debate on the role that the education sciences have with a view to a new *humanization* of mankind, it was intended to undertake a specifically pedagogical deepening of those meta-empirical dimensions that, although not immediately experiential and on the *investigative method* of positive sciences, implicitly affect educational dynamics. Initially, a theoretical and epistemological reflection was undertaken on the value of the dimensions of the human not immediately addressed to the empirical sphere, recalling some voices of contemporary culture that appear particularly relevant with respect to the themes announced. The lively comparison between philosophers of education of different anthropological backgrounds, such as Edgar

Morin, Wolfgang Brezinka and Alasdair MacIntyre, who are nevertheless united by an ideal thematic itinerary that argues against contemporary pedagogy and recalls it to its original mission, allows us to identify an ideal point of convergence in the need for an integral reform of education. This makes it possible to reopen the frontiers of philosophical and pedagogical research even in dimensions, *such as ontological, axiological and metaphysical* ones, that in recent years have been relegated to the peripheries of contemporary culture due to the prevalence of a *neo-scientism* that tends to attribute to the physical and experimental sciences and their methods the ability to satisfy all the problems and needs of man.

To take into account the consciousness of the illusory nature of an intellectual movement that persists in surviving in the now empty form and the need to turn investigative attention to a more broadly *spiritual* dimension than man, they lend themselves to opening up mostly unexplored research paths for a deeper understanding of the human being, becoming a new starting point for the design of a new epistemological architecture of pedagogical knowledge and for the conferral of a new *meaning* to education.

Against this backdrop, the guiding hypothesis of the research conducted was the existence of an area of pre-development in the individual, not adequately considered by pedagogical knowledge, from which it is necessary to start again in order to renew education.

The longitudinal quali-quantitative survey conducted on a sample of Apulian students demonstrated not only the existence of such an area, but also its receptiveness to stimuli. (De Angelis, 2018). The validity of the hypothesis formulated was then also confirmed by a historiographical comparison. The historiographical testimony to which we refer concerns the experience of a number of men and women who, at different times, developed this pre-development area through an educational pathway. They distinguished themselves by virtue, i.e. by ἀρετή, *arête*, and achieved levels of humanity and morality that made them exemplars for other individuals. The *arête* referred to here can be understood, in the classical sense, as:

- disposition of mind aimed towards good
- a person's ability to excel, to perform acts optimally, to be, that is, virtuous according to a *perfect way of being*
- fortitude
- moral and physical vigour
- human excellence
- ability to govern the *polis* well
- realization of the innate essence of the person, protected from birth to perfection; it is not understood, then, the reason why pedagogy, especially in recent times, has weakened the link with philosophy, at the expense of an integral *vision* of the person and an *ontological understanding* of the human.

Such aptitudes were well known and pursued by the classical education of the *paideia* of virtues, but currently in the classical education of the younger generations they have fallen almost completely into disuse. If we wanted to understand the reason for this cultural change, we must consider the need for independence of pedagogy from philosophical thought and foundation of pedagogy as an autonomous science. This fact explains at least in part the departure of pedagogy from philosophy and the approach to the positive sciences. This has caused the impoverishment of the theory of formation on an epistemological level, the oblivion of the classical *paideia* of virtues and the fragmentation and hyper-specialization of the knowledge relating to human formation.

Among the philosophers who have affirmed the need to promote a synergy between philosophical sciences and pedagogical sciences and, between pedagogical sciences and human sciences, we point out Edith Stein, for the depth of the reflection conducted on these issues.

In fact, she stated that «knowing the structure, functions and laws of development of the human body (Körper) can allow the educator to know what can be useful or harmful for a development in conformity with human nature (Stein, 1932). Likewise, it is equally important for the philosopher to know the general laws of the life of the human soul in order to consider them in her educational work. In this perspective, the question of being as a person and its ontology constitute the axiological foundation of the theory

of education. Because of this, it also makes sense to state that the question of being as a person and its ontology¹ can become the strength and driving force of every pedagogical experience.

Following this line of study, a philosophical reflection on education has first been undertaken, through an investigation not of an intellectual or psychoanalytic or existential nature on the human being, but, like philosophers of *personalistic education*, in the Steinerian way, *metaphysical*, that is, capable of understanding the human, in the Renaissance way (Chiosso, 1998), «in the completeness of its dimensions» (ibid. p. 8).

Combining analytic philosophy with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development explains how a child's learning takes place with the help of others. Indeed, there is a real distance between the level of actual development and that of potential development, which can only be bridged through empathic experience and intersubjectivity activated by a meaningful and generative educational process, capable of deeply impacting the volitional sphere of the child's intentional consciousness. Here, then, is the focus of educational action and the very object of pedagogical knowledge. The metaphysical mystery of the human being, considered not only from a rational and gnoseological point of view, but more broadly spiritual. In fact, in addition to reason and the senses, the child possesses a non-computable dimension of a metaphysical nature: the will, or intentional consciousness. It represents the true perfectibility potential of human nature, because, when activated, it naturally triggers the volitional acts and biological interactions that enable the transition from a level of potential development to a level of actual development, i.e. from being to being.

Subsequently, after highlighting the specific locus of pedagogical action, i.e. the metaphysical place in which the possible response to related stimuli is located (man's control room and the spiritual principle, which governs human action) we sought to translate the

1 Ontology, in philosophical language, is the study of being as such and its fundamental categories. Axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature and cultural-historical evolution of values such as beauty, goodness, truth and justice.

knowledge acquired into educational experiences. Indeed, we wanted to verify whether the stimulation of such places of human receptivity produced significant, and thus appreciable, qualitative changes in the cognitive responses and behavioral postures of the children and young people subjected to qualitative-quantitative research.

In particular, we used Vygotskij's theory of zones of proximal development and Bruner's scaffolding theory to define and implement an educational intervention model capable of stimulating the perfectibility potential of children and young people in selected primary and secondary schools in the Apulian school system. First, a learning environment was set up to foster a climate of trust, serenity, acceptance of teaching proposals and collaboration. The model envisaged the use of a number of innovative tools such as audiovisual stimuli, the widening of the field of experience and a scaffolding, i.e. a set of helping strategies used by the experts involved in the field experience, to facilitate the learning process of contents and behavioral postures. These were, according to the elaborated project model, of high socio-ethical-affective impact. The experimentation yielded, in all the cases analyzed, appreciable positive qualitative results, albeit partial and in any case not definitive (De Angelis, 2018; De Angelis, 2022).

The outcome of the qualitative-quantitative study was the acquisition of the certainty that no other explanation is plausible for the choice of behavioral postures with a strong socio-ethical-affective value on the part of certain individuals than the existence of a spiritual principle² guiding human actions. This principle is the only one that can account for the uniqueness and unrepeatability of the responses given to the educational stimulation offered to the pupils involved in the longitudinal field research. The educational inter-

- 2 This spiritual principle guiding human actions is commonly defined as 'soul'. The soul has two faculties: intelligence and will. These faculties are called in different ways by authors such as Montessori, 1972; Giussani, 1966; Moscato, 2015. They concern the *central nucleus* of the human person: *will* and *volition*. The investigation of the two main faculties of human intelligence cannot be done with the *epistemology of positive sciences* (observation of the facts and the experimental verification of theories), but it is necessary to resort to the *gnoseology of spiritual sciences*, that is to the gnoseology of the sciences that have as their object *the constitutive reality of the human*.

vention aimed at acting on the area of pupils' proximal development, through the progressive stimulation of the potential for human perfectibility, gave satisfactory results in all the contexts where the socio-ethical-affective model was implemented. The results were all the more satisfactory the longer the educational intervention conducted. These findings are in line with what Maria Montessori wrote about the child in her book *The Secret of Childhood* (1950). Observation in the field with children shows that they possess avoidant energies and moral dispositions, which, if appropriately stimulated, respond in a certain and variable way, favoring learning.

Other more recent studies conducted by Luigina Mortari, as part of a pedagogical paradigm based on virtue education, the philosophy of care and a new wisdom of education, have produced positive results comparable with ours. (Mortari, 2015; Mortari 2017).

The existence of the human will, the spiritual principle that regulates actions in the individual, seems irrefutable. It can be understood in two ways:

1) As the spiritual faculty inherent in the human intellect. It makes it possible to plan, choose and implement behaviours suitable for the achievement of certain ends. It is distinct from any lower form of practical activity such as tendency, instinct, impulse, habit, etc.

2) As an activity aimed at seeking or modifying reality. It manifests itself as a disposition to do something.

The study of the laws and activation mechanisms of this natural device, which acts in an active and direct way in learning processes, constitutes a new frontier of educational theory and a new field of pedagogical research.

The study of the laws and mechanisms of activation of this natural device, the intentional consciousness or will, which acts in an active and direct way on learning processes, constitutes a new frontier of educational theory and a new field of investigation for pedagogical research. The activation of the will can play a decisive role in overcoming certain learning difficulties in children and can support various teaching techniques in overcoming critical issues arising from educational and relational problems. Even in the presence of

certified socio-cultural and dysfunctional problems, the activation of the spiritual principle of the will brings innumerable benefits, as demonstrated by research in the field. (De Angelis 2021)

Today there is general confusion on the subject of learning difficulties and special educational needs, even in the psycho-pedagogical field. Very often, a psychological, organic or functional cause is sought for problems of a relational and educational nature. Sometimes, on the contrary, one wants to deny the evidence of problems of a psychological or functional nature. The basic problem is that when the spiritual nature of human intelligence is misunderstood, when the affective dimension of knowledge is neglected, or when relational or educational errors are made, there are always repercussions both at the level of learning and at the level of attitudes and behavioral postures. The current educational emergency of childhood and adolescence in affluent societies can be better understood if one considers that compulsory schooling has dried up considerably on a cultural and relational level, and that current school curricula leave little room for reflexivity, dialogue, listening and confrontation with others. These are the pillars of the development of human potential and in particular of the acquisition of a critical awareness and the attainment of human and intellectual maturity. The school, however, neglects all this and does not leave time to cultivate the healthy educational relationships and RMA dialogues that are essential, propaedeutic and complementary to the knowledge and learning of disciplinary content.

The experience conducted in the field has made it possible to get to know multiple school realities, with the specific dynamics of each context, and to provide further proof of the validity of the principle of the universal educability of the human being. Maria Montessori strenuously defended this principle. (Montessori, 1950)

Indeed, there is no such thing as a child who cannot progress both cognitively and educationally if adequately stimulated. However, it is necessary to recognize, as Luigina Mortari states, that knowledge always has an affective and intentional dimension. This dimension, in our opinion, cannot be bypassed and must always be wisely activated by the teacher, supported and connected with the other dimensions of the human being (the cognitive and emotional spheres) so that the learning process is effective and fruitful. The af-

fective dimension is a spiritual dimension that pertains to the specific essence of interiority. As concrete experience with children of all ages shows, pedagogy can be considered the true secret of childhood and the key to the child's intelligence. At a time when dryness and notional formalism dominate the current cultural scene outside and inside schools, it is important to promote a deeper knowledge of human nature and human ontology. With the specific contribution of the humanities and the study of numerous sources from the Western cultural heritage, it is possible to illuminate many grey areas of knowledge of human behavior and to achieve a deeper understanding of the child.

Whatever a child's previous condition and specific problems, there is always a way to the individual's heart. Don Bosco's persuasive and preventive method and the Silesian schools have demonstrated the wonders of education of the heart to entire generations.

3.2 Future education for childhood and adolescence

In this particular historical moment, tormented by the COVID-19 pandemic and a dramatic international crisis produced by the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is more necessary than ever to reflect, if only from a cultural point of view, on the need to promote a 'new integral education' of the individual from the earliest stages of life.

In fact, there is a need for a new culture and a new education, which will accompany students throughout the course of their existence and teach them a very difficult and excellent art: the art of being human. This art is that of being 'good' and 'virtuous' men and women, capable of living the great values and ideals that are most authentically human. Those that have inspired some men and women of the past, who are considered 'the greats of history'. These people who reflect this art of being human have consumed their existence loving and embodying the values of peace, justice, scientific and social progress, democracy, tolerance, mutual aid and even forgiveness.

Returning to these great universal ideals can be useful in broadening the field of vision and reflecting on issues of great relevance to the contemporary individual, which concern human anthropo-

logy and its constitutive and permanent educational and relational need. More than a century ago, the American pedagogue and philosopher John Dewey reflected on the relational need in *Democracy and Education*, which was first published in 1916 (Dewey, 1916). This work still deserves to be read and explored in educational and cultural contexts.

Dewey's theory, in fact, can help rediscover the existential and transformative value of education and its political and social spin-offs. At a time in history when hyper-specialization and scholastic formalism have withered and sacrificed the essence of human education and this has led to the withering of erudition, it is necessary to teach individuals the free and conscious exercise of the higher neuron-cortical faculties. Intelligence and freedom, as stated by the neuroscientist Eccles in *How the Self Controls Its Brain* (1994), are faculties of a spiritual nature that must be properly educated in order to live a happy, socially integrated and 'successful' human life.

The universal educational principle announced by the American philosopher more than a century ago establishes reciprocity and interdependence between individual education and community and social life, i.e. between education and politics. Dewey asserted that not only does the type of education imparted to individuals give a specific shape and characteristics to the society in which they live, but the school and education are particularly responsible for the political and social regulation of a people. Schooling is, in fact, for Dewey the constitutive principle and foundation of politics. The education of individuals and the type of education can depend on the social development and progress of human communities.

The general theory of education, moreover, states that any education inspired by moderate and democratic values and resulting from the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the species is capable of guaranteeing not only human survival but also the progress and peaceful coexistence of humankind, solving many problems of existence.

If one assumes the educational principle of the American philosopher, who was one of the greatest exponents of activism, and accepts the pedagogical doctrine according to which the spontaneous activity of the child is a decisive and central educational element in formative processes, then a question arises. Is it possible to say that

where there are serious political and social problems and international conflicts in the world, then perhaps the training and education provided by schools has been lacking in respect to the cultural values and demands of democracy, justice, peace, defence of the human person, freedom of thought and cooperation?

The hypothesis that has guided the present reflection on the current educational emergency of childhood and adolescence in Western industrialized countries answers the question just posed in the affirmative. The scholarly literature on this topic in general agrees with the reflections I am proposing here in particular and compares the main theories of human education with the concrete experiences of today's school protagonists and does not hesitate to speak of a 'crisis of education'. In the face of this generalized crisis, it is necessary to propose new pedagogical content and new teaching methodologies (Corsi, 2015; Elia, 2021).

Dewey's general theory of education can be a good starting point for recovering some of the axioms of human education and conceptualizing a new pedagogical model. The first axiom is that the need for education is a permanent constitutive and ontological need, which is original and inalienable. The first axiom leads us to the recognition of the second: the human species presents characteristics of uniqueness within the animal kingdom. In fact, humans, unlike animals, need a very long apprenticeship, approximately 18 years, to reach maturity. During this long period, the human pup is dependent on others and must continually learn from others the most congenial existential modalities for its survival and fulfilment.

The human person, from the earliest stages of life, is not only projected towards the satisfaction of instincts but also towards knowledge and towards a particular affectivity. The two axioms of Dewey's general theory of education introduce us to a third axiom: the spirit-corporeal nature of the human species – the only species with free will. This is the last frontier of neuroscience. Until the 1900s, the concepts of soul, mind and conscience were outside science, remaining the exclusive heritage of psychoanalysis, philosophy, psychology, ethics and religion. There were no rigorous theories on intelligence, mind, thought or emotion.

Everything has changed since the 1980s, when the new neurosciences took over the concepts of brain, mind and consciousness,

thanks to the wonderful methods of brain imaging, genetics and molecular biology. Brain imaging methods allow us to observe «*in vivo*» what happens in the brain when a subject performs various activities (Panksepp, 2012); it allows us to know many brain mechanisms, which in turn permits us to discover the neural correlates of mental activity, the connections between synapses, and the connections between neurons and brain abnormalities in various mental pathologies. These methods provide a large amount of data.

So far, the results have been wonderful, but we are still in the early stages. We are still at the beginning. Brain, mind and consciousness remain mostly elusive entities, which still hide unexplored depths. The immaterial production 'linked' to neuronal functioning, but 'in excess' with respect to it, that is, not coincident with it, is an elusive and unfathomable entity. According to authoritative neuroscientists, the dimension of neuronal functioning that is "in excess" of the physical brain (i.e. the mind-brain problem) cannot be subjected to scientific investigation and therefore cannot be totally known. The Nobel laureates Eccles and Sperry bowed to the enigmas of the mind, consciousness (mental phenomena) and conscience (feeling of right and wrong, etc.), i.e. of how a material structure, the brain, can generate an immaterial activity, the mind (Eccles, 1994; Sperry, 2008).

The mind has a cerebral basis because it is a psychic act, but in its substance, it has nothing to do with the vegetative structure of the nervous system. Our mental, spiritual acts are «embodied». Thought is on a supra-temporal plane, but it is embodied over time as it is rooted in the brain. It is not my body that 'is angry, that thinks, suffers, rejoices, acts, loves'. It is I 'who am angry'.

Neuroscience leads us towards a 'Trinitarian knowledge' of the human person. The characteristics of the human species place man and woman on a different level from that of animals. More than a century ago, Dewey recognized the specificity and uniqueness of the human species; he also affirmed the vital importance of formative processes for the survival of the human species and for social progress (Dewey, 1916).

Dewey deepened the concept of the uniqueness of the human species and observed the behaviour of individuals throughout history from an anthropological perspective. He thus came to recognize that

education is not a contingent element or a temporary necessity for the individual that one can do without, but it is rather an original and permanent ontological necessity of the human species. While animals, in order to live, follow the natural laws of instinct, pleasure and self-preservation, humans, endowed with intelligence and will, i.e. cognitive abilities and moral dispositions, are not content to survive by following instinct. They question what is the best 'form' and 'direction' to give to their existence in order to achieve satisfaction and full happiness.

This is how important education and instruction imparted by one's peers becomes for humans. It is through education, in fact, that the culture, knowledge and values of peoples are transmitted. In addition, in particular, it is through education for peace and through the transmission of democratic values that consciousness and consciences are formed for civic responsibility, tolerance, cooperation, environmental protection and human solidarity. With this kind of culture, then, 'great' men and women are formed not so much anagraphically as culturally, scientifically and humanly. This is how good politicians and enlightened intellectuals, those dedicated to the pursuit of truth and the common good, those dedicated to the realization of scientific and social progress, environmental protection and the building of a better world, are prepared for action (De Angelis, 2022).

In different terms, psychoanalysis, too, almost a century ago, made explicit the difficulty of the human condition, which it interpreted through the paradigm of conflict or the inner war between the id, ego and superego. In *Warum Krieg?* (1933), which in English is translated as *Why the War?*, a collection of letters exchanged between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud at the end of World War I and before the outbreak of World War II, the two scientists questioned the human condition in order to understand the origins of armed conflict (Einstein & Freud, 1933).

At a time when prejudices, economic interests, rigidity of thought and authoritarian ideologies are once again appearing on the scene of international history, it is important to revive a humanistic culture and humanizing knowledge through schools, starting from the earliest stages of life. These ingredients are indispensable and fundamental for the formation of a mature, responsible critical consciousness that respects the ideas of others. (Nussbaum, 2016)

Along with these ingredients, it is necessary to promote a ‘new integral education of the person’. Indeed, the individual also needs to learn to govern his/her passions and a sometimes-misguided instinct that can lead him/her astray. Only an integral education of the human person can raise the mind to the heights of which it is capable. Conversely, the transmission of a formal and notionistic culture, separated from concrete life and the deep aspirations of the human heart, forms half-hearted, incomplete men and women. Such individuals are not capable of exploring new paths of humanization and new forms of dialogue and mutual understanding, because they are still struggling with their own passions and emotions. The new integral education that we intend to propose here would be suitable for reconstructing the existential fragmentation and the fracture between spirit and body introduced by modern culture. Various teaching experiences in schools of all levels demonstrate the positive impact of the new pedagogical model (De Angelis, 2018, 2022). The pedagogical model proposed here reconciles tradition and innovation. Indeed, not only does it make use of classical culture, but it draws on the original sources as well as the web and online literature, which have been largely unexplored as resources for achieving these educational goals.

3.2.1 *Human education between past and future*

In antiquity, according to a gendered language then used, the ‘human par excellence’, the ‘vir’ or ‘virtuous man’, the ‘politician’, could not fail to take an interest in the education of citizens, even if only of those recognized as such. This is why the reciprocity and interdependence between education and politics have traditionally been affirmed. In the past, the formation of the human coincided with the formation of the citizen, and political experience thus became a necessary condition for human formation (Bertolini, 2003).

The history of Western thought, inaugurated in the 5th century B.C. with Socrates and Plato and the experiences of the city-states of Sparta and Athens, showed the existence of a vital link that binds the triad of education, politics and virtue. All classical philosophy taught and propagated the *paideia* of virtues, strongly affirming

that a good politician is always and only the product of a long and effective educational process. To be guided by the pursuit of truth and the common good, one's actions always require a good theoretical education, a long apprenticeship and an eye fixed on virtuous models from which to take inspiration.

The rational and balanced design of the development of the potential for human perfectibility, which in Aristotelian thought was synthesized with the idea of the 'just means', was enriched with another dimension during the advent of Christianity: religion. Christianity teaches, in fact, a new idea of humanity and announces a new possible perfection that becomes within the reach of every human as they are sustained by 'grace', that is, participation in the divine life. The Christian, in fact, is the follower of Christ; he can aspire, through faith, to obedience and self-education, to overcome his passions and live in the world in every circumstance of life, realizing a new form of 'human perfection' (Rubini, 2022).

The perspective of a humanity potentially elevated by the union of grace and personal freedom has had important effects on political, philosophical and educational culture. Thomas Aquinas believed that man's/women's end is not pleasure or interest but rather happiness. On account of this, happiness can be achieved through knowledge and a practical life supported by divine grace. Every individual, through an educational path of personal commitment combined with faith, is able to achieve full human fulfilment and happiness.

The rational educational design proposed by Thomas Aquinas takes the Aristotelian theory of the 'just means' and extends it by focusing on the religious dimension. The human realization of man cannot disregard political education, according to a perspective that unites humanity, science and faith. The happy and fully realized man, according to Thomas Aquinas, is a new figure who emerges from individualism, selfishness and political indifference, because he 'feels called' to ethical and civic commitment to achieve the 'common good'.

The model of human perfection inspired by the evangelical ideal entered into crisis with the affirmation of the Enlightenment ideal of a freedom that was free from any historical or meta-historical reference. The modern age saw the affirmation of very revolutionary ideas of humanity, such as Nietzsche's Superman, which placed the

only criterion of validity and falsifiability of human action in individual freedom. The consequences and drifts of such a perspective have been postmodern nihilism, indifference and subjectivism.

At present, the re-presentation of an existential and political perspective, inspired by classical philosophy and Christian anthropology, might appear naive and even anachronistic compared to the predominant cultural models, which are inspired by hedonism, individualism and narcissism and are relentlessly conveyed by the Internet and social media. The word 'good', affirms D'Addelfio, appears impractical. 'Good' is a word that has become taboo, even in educational and academic circles, in light of past and present historical and cultural events; it is traversed by various forms and manifestations of new anti-metaphysical theories and a deconstructive ideology falsely understood as absolute freedom (D'Addelfio, 2021).

Yet, in the face of the profound cultural and educational crisis that grips the present, it makes sense to reflect on the great themes of goodness, freedom and virtue and to seek new paths of humanization and new frontiers for the integral, lifelong formation of individuals, mixing tradition and innovation.

In fact, if we simultaneously draw on themes and modes of communication from both the tradition of Western religious-philosophical thought and from new educational channels present in the age of social networking and online literature, then it is possible to promote a new multidimensional and multimodal literacy amongst the younger generations. In this way, they can be formed and prepared to live peacefully and responsibly in today's reality.

3.2.2 *The current educational emergency of the younger generations*

Education constitutes one of the nodal points of today's anthropological question. The current school crisis is linked to a multiplicity of causes that is traceable to three cultural macro-areas: religion, politics and economics.

The current educational emergency of the younger generations seems to be linked, in the first place, to the loss of the 'sense of the sacred' of life and of the human, that is, to the loss of the *Timor Domini* and of all of those religious concepts that in the past put a

brake on the disordered passions of human nature, inspiring and directing man's life towards the good. Currently, the loss of the 'sense of the sacred' and the disappearance of metaphysical horizons within which to situate one's existence have produced in individuals, and particularly in the younger generations, an alteration in the perception of their individual freedom (De Angelis, 2022).

Individual freedom is often perceived today in a distorted way as being 'unlimited', 'all-powerful' and 'free of all morals'. This opinion is widespread today. While in the past, the phenomenon of deviance was common to certain types of individuals, i.e. to subjects belonging to certain social groups considered 'at risk' and who manifested variable forms of sociocultural malaise, today the situation has changed. There is no longer any distinction between social groups with regard to certain forms of 'risk' behaviour. Today, transgression has become a fashion, and with it, certain disorderly forms of using freedom are fashionable. Statistical studies also confirm that real forms of deviance have multiplied in all social strata and involve increasingly younger age groups.

The crisis in education and parental authority is increasingly seen as a social emergency. The emergency is largely due to the profound changes that have taken place in contemporary society and in the family; the latter, in particular, is more fragile than in the past and, consequently, is sometimes incapable of imposing a strong and authoritative educational model.

Even the relative autonomy of schooling as an institutional enterprise and the educational disengagement of the school and the total and sole delegation of the responsibility for education to the family are no longer sustainable in the current emergency. The educational function of the state and the need for greater public intervention are issues of great interest and importance. The constitutional discipline of education, i.e. the disciplining of education through the legal-political constitution in some states, represents the justifying source of the legitimacy of a new and effective public intervention to support the mission of the family. In Italy, for example, the reinterpretation of Article 30(1) of the Constitution not only legitimizes but also clarifies the state's educational function (Marchetti, 2012).

Parents are obviously free to pass on to their children the values

and moral principles they consider to be priorities and to choose the educational tools they consider most appropriate without interference from the public authorities. This freedom, however, necessarily encounters limits. The first limit is that if one considers, for example, the duty of parents to educate their offspring, then respect for that duty entails recognition of the freedom to educate, not to educate or to educate in such a way as to harm others. In other words, even the freedom of parents to educate cannot be absolute, but relative. One of the limits on parents' ability to educate (or not educate) their children is that, for example, they must not harm others.

On a political and intercultural level, the phenomenon of large-scale migration, globalization, the ethnic and religious pluralism that characterizes our daily lives, and the need to promote peaceful co-existence and inclusion have also contributed to causing a sort of 'forgetting of memory' and 'cultural uprooting' from the contexts of belonging. The illusion of being able to construct a multifaceted identity that is flexible and free from any cultural conditioning is in fact making individuals restless, confused, weak, uncertain, unstable and sometimes without points of reference or stabilizing certainties.

The pedagogical literature in recent years also does not fail to reflect on the importance of the culture of belonging and, in particular, on the usefulness of faith and religious practice in educational processes. It particularly highlights the 'reassuring' and 'stabilizing' effect that religion has on the balanced development of the human personality (Moscatto et al., 2017; Bianchi, 2022).

Based on this evidence, it is possible to state that the formation and development of the potential for human perfectibility cannot be separated from cultural and value anchors. Some authoritative voices from the contemporary scientific world converge on this. These include Oderberg, Haldane and MacIntyre. In analysing the second cause of the educational crisis, we will pause to reflect on some elements of the current international political crisis in industrialized countries, which are linked to the educational emergency of the younger generations.

First of all, looking at the lesson of recent history and, in particular, the history of the century that has just ended, it is fair to say that the current international political crisis is essentially identified with the loss of the historical and social nature of politics. Politics

today, in fact, seems to have lost its real motivations, with the renunciation of its autonomy in favour of an uncritical dependence on the economy and the logic of profit.

The global economic and financial crisis that erupted in 2008, affecting many countries, particularly those in Europe, the USA and other industrialized countries, had the 1929 crisis as its historical precedent. Briefly reviewing the main events, let us recall how a decline in employment and consumption began in the USA at the end of 2007. The number of people in arrears with their mortgage payments began to rise alarmingly, along with enforcement proceedings by creditors: those who could not pay their mortgages suffered foreclosures and forced sales. House prices were falling, and Americans were afraid to make investments.

During the financial crisis, some governments took on debt to bail out the banks. In Europe, a number of banks were bought by the states (the most prominent cases were in Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands) or financed by private investors who bailed them out of the crisis. Europe adopted austerity policies to save the banks from the crisis and had to make significant cuts in investments in education and health. The negative effects of the global financial crisis on education have been twofold: the first, the one just described, is of a purely financial nature (the drop in investment and economic resources to be employed in education policies); the second is of a cultural nature and is the more insidious and hidden effect. It seems, in fact, that the education systems of many industrialized countries have absorbed and interjected 'forms, contents and ideals' proper to the economic logic of profit of the industrialized countries' production systems, to the detriment of the humanities, reflexivity, the in-depth study of scholarly content and the procedures of integral human formation.

Many school systems today appear to be unbalanced in terms of the acquisition of notions and an excessively formal and mnemonic culture, which does not touch the concrete life of pupils and does not help to form mature and balanced personalities. Even assessment procedures, which are excessively computerized and computational in nature, are unable to grasp the progress and formative developments of pupils or their reflexivity and capacity to understand and criticize content (Elia, 2021).

3.2.3 *Childhood in the contemporary world: ideas and customs*

In the contemporary world, all stages of life are involved in the cultural decay described above. For this reason, pedagogues are currently reflecting more and more on the need «to cultivate from the earliest ages of life evolved human qualities such as: pro-sociality, understanding, intentional listening and communication, cooperation, emotional self-awareness, [and] reflection». They are indispensable for the individual to be able to self-edify and assume the form most congenial to his or her own inner nature (Ulivieri & Dozza, 2016, p. 64).

The new scientific insights from neurobiology, psychology, pedagogy and anthropology have produced a renewed focus on the world of childhood in contemporary culture. The introduction of modern brain imaging techniques has made it possible for neuroscience to analyse brain structures and to gain a deeper understanding of the complex mechanisms behind cognitive functioning. The old fairy tales and romantic narratives of the world of childhood that dominated the culture of past centuries have given way to ‘more objective’ knowledge based on the concrete reality of the child. The child is now observed using a scientific approach, which is able to grasp its two-dimensional corporeal and spiritual nature (Panksepp & Davis, 2020; Kandel, 2016).

The term ‘spiritual’ refers to the real and ‘immaterial’ mental production, corresponding to brain matter and its complex anatomy. To this ‘immaterial production’, that is, to human self-consciousness, will, art and mathematics, the attentions of neurobiology and the most sophisticated and refined scientific research are directed.

For example, Kandel recently studied the cellular, molecular and genetic mechanisms of memory, leading to the discovery of synaptic plasticity. In the text entitled *Art and Neuroscience. Comparing the Two Cultures* (2016), Kandel argues that science can shape the way we enjoy works of art and help us understand their meanings. This happens due to a kind of interaction between brain circuits and ‘immaterial production’. In practice, the sensitization of a sensory neuron, through art, for example, is able to activate a gene, which then triggers the synthesis of proteins that modify the synapse. Here, there

is a scientific demonstration of how culture can modify the synapses and behaviour of individuals.

From a neurobiological point of view, now the child appears to be much more than an animal or a 'naked ape' (Morris, 1974; Kandel, 2016; Panksepp & Davis, 2020). Human behaviour is supported by innate neuronal mechanisms that are capable of generating primary attunement with the environment and early human interactions. These interactions are capable of activating motor, affective and cognitive patterns of a progressively more elaborate and flexible type. In such schemes, behaviours and adaptive aims, one can find precociously original, unique existential inclinations and postures towards the world, which await recognition, authentication, promotion and revival from adults.

Such recognition and promotion are not always taken for granted. The current generalized educational crisis in industrialized countries has also affected adult-child and parent-child relationships. These relationships have become extremely difficult and problematic today, to the extent that it is increasingly considered essential in the pedagogical sphere to revise both adult-child relationships and education.

However, who is really the child to be educated? What is his or her inner nature? In addition, what paths must be trodden with him, so that the long and articulated formative processes pursue the lofty and unavoidable goals of integral human maturity? Asking oneself these questions is necessary and preparatory to any cultural or pedagogical endeavour because it would not be possible to construct an effective educational project without first confronting the ontology and constitutive nature of the human being (Nussbaum, 2010).

Some insights from the pedagogical sciences, dating back to the previous century, shed light on the complexity of human ontology. In *The Secret of Childhood* (1936), Maria Montessori, an Italian physician, philosopher and pedagogue, warned adults and, in particular, teachers and parents against the 'cultural prejudices' that prevent them from knowing and supporting true human nature through the educational process.

The nature of the child, observed through the dual lens of medical science and interpretative pedagogy, would, according to Montessori, be marked not only by 'vital energies', but also by 'natural

moral dispositions' typical of a subject that, although it is a biological organism similar to that of other species, presents a specific inability to be reduced to those traits of other living species. These specific aptitudes place the human person 'at the apex' of the realm of the living.

This specificity makes the child a kind of 'spiritual embryo' at the origin of which there would be a secret plan of fulfilment and happiness imprinted on its very nature and episodically visible through the individual faculties and aptitudes of each child as they emerge in the course of spontaneous activities. The child is, for Maria Montessori, a 'spiritual embryo' on which the Creator has placed a design of perfectibility and happiness in the deepest part of the spirit. This design, through birth, is irrevocably handed over to human freedom: first that of the parents, then that of the teachers and then with the onset of maturity to its own freedom. (Montessori, 1950)

This new vision of the child has important consequences for the educational relationship. It is necessary, Montessori observes, for the adult to find within himself the as yet unknown error that prevents him from 'seeing' the child. The error of which the scientist speaks is the adult's pride. «The adult has attributed to himself an almost divine power: he has ended up believing that he is the child's God [...] and in his blindness he mimics the child's evolutionary nature and believes he is making the child a being in his own image and likeness (Montessori, 1950).

This is an error that has been perpetuated throughout history and that currently appears to be highly topical. For what is childhood today if not a reality that 'disturbs' the lives of adults? It is seen as a constant 'burden' for individuals to avoid and relegate to the margins of a fully successful existence. Today's human lives a frenetic life in which productivity, competitiveness, power, having, paroxysmal consumption of goods and pleasure are the only values to which one can aspire. The adult is always tense and preoccupied: tired because of multifaceted and complex work and interpersonal relationships, multiplied and shattered exponentially by media possibilities and the advent of the web and social networks.

In fact, the spread of social networks has transformed the communicative and relational modes of individuals who, in any place

and at any time of day, can communicate with other individuals or groups of people with a common interest. Calmness, silence, the spirit of observation, spontaneous, genuine and authentic social relations, composure, restraint, reflexivity and tranquility are existential dimensions that are mostly alien to, and impossible for, the contemporary human.

In this cultural context of hyper-digitalization and hyper-connectedness, couples struggle to plan marriages and establish families; they avoid conceiving children who would be destined to live 'alone', because they (the potential parents) are too busy and would not have time to care for their children. This is the main reason why we close ourselves off from childhood and very often avoid conceiving children. There is no place for childhood in the small homes of the contemporary city, where haste, loneliness and anonymity reign supreme, and there is no room left in people's hearts, except when one is too old or when the desired children do not arrive.

There is no place for children in the streets of increasingly overpopulated cities, where a sense of security is lost in the unfamiliar faces of compatriots and migrants and where one is afraid to say a word to anyone. Fathers and mothers are often both forced to work and have little time to devote to their children. There is nowhere for the child to 'feel' that his or her soul is fully understood and where he or she can engage in spontaneous activity that is entirely congenial to him or her.

The child in the affluent strata appears increasingly harried and busy and sometimes verges on perceptual saturation and cognitive overstimulation (Bobbio, 2019). Adults are often ashamed of them in adults' organizations. An adult who talks to another adult is unlikely to respond to a child's questions and curiosity, and his or her attention seeking will be interpreted as a 'whim' to be punished.

In other cases, though, the problem is the other way around and there seems to be a real attenuation of the adult's ability to guard the rules and to communicate and transfer a sense of limits. Towards the end of the 1990s, another strand of studies developed, which contrasts the question of rights with the theme of the child who exaggerates those same rights that have been granted to him or her in an inconsistent and disorganized manner by a society increasingly centred on having rather than on being. Thus emerges the face of a

child who is excessively demanding (for affection, time, attention, stimulation and recognition). Lasch (2020) speaks of a 'tyrant child', affectively immature, who is a child of a society of narcissism.

Different customs have now crystallized in time and been made worse by the current frenzy. In fact, in the practice of customary life, childhood is placed in an ambiguous position of difficulty, marginality and almost irresolvable minority. Sometimes the reality of the 'slave child' emerges, at other times, that of the 'tyrant child', but on closer inspection, these are two sides of a single coin: that of the 'loss or impairment of the parental function by adults' and the generalized confusion that generates dysfunctional relationships. Such conditions of child nature, as Montessori warned a century ago, 'have brought and continue to bring about many consequences that are a great danger to the psychic life of children' (Montessori, 1950).

For this reason, it is necessary not only that there be awareness of the current critical issues and risks affecting the world of childhood, but even more so that there be concrete support for contemporary parenting, so that the attitude of adults towards childhood changes. Working consciously for childhood and pursuing this work to the fullest, with the intention of 'saving it from the present' cultural drifts, would mean, in Maria Montessori's words, 'discovering and conquering the secret of humanity', that is, discovering the roots of society's true progress. (Montessori, 1950)

3.2.4 Conception and condition of adolescence in the social age

The current metamorphosis of the family context, the widespread assumption of planned parenthood, the general crisis of marriage and generativity are factors that strongly challenge the concepts of maternity and paternity and that have repercussions for the condition of infant or adolescent children. Adolescence is a delicate and important existential moment in which the transition from child to adult status occurs. It covers a rather long period, varying from individual to individual and from culture to culture, in which numerous physical and bodily transformations take place and profound psychological changes occur, affecting the individual's cognitive abilities, the sphere of affection and social skills.

Adolescence is the time of identity construction, of concreteness, of critical thinking, of short-term questions, of comparing oneself with friends and girlfriends, of 'putting oneself out there' and doing something before asking oneself whether it is 'right' or 'wrong'. Young adolescents often carry out actions before they have even thought about whether they should do them, because after a long apprenticeship lived in a safe and protected environment – the natural family – they want to experience their own potential and for the first time face the challenges presented by reality 'alone'.

The authors who have contributed most to defining the topic of identity construction in adolescence are Erikson (1982) and Marcia (1966, 1980). Vygotsky (1934), Bruner (1990) and Cole (1989) provided the theoretical tools to critically approach it.

Vygotsky is credited with the concept of the 'zone of proximal development', i.e. the space for adult intervention in the development of the learner's potential and the enhancement of skills. Vygotsky further states that the development of individuals' natural abilities is partly a function of the so-called 'cultural amplifiers', i.e. the tools that culture places at the service of the learner's mind. Bruner's contribution, on the other hand, can be found in the concept of 'knowledge' being thought of as the 'shared search for and construction of the meaning of things', thanks to the complementary progress of logical-scientific thinking and narrative thinking.

Cole explains the development of children by studying attachment styles, parenting styles and development stages, but he is also famous for his important cross-cultural research. He shows that the cultural differences found in the cognitive processes of individuals are not so much to be attributed to the presence/absence of different processes amongst different cultural groups but rather to the concrete and specific situations in which those cognitive processes develop (Cole, 1989).

On a phenomenological level, it is possible to state that there is an interdependent relationship between the sociocultural context in which the individual's socio-ethical-affective development takes place, the specifics of the development and the degree to which it can be achieved.

Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and the cultural psychology of the later Bruner and Cole teach us to pay attention to the histori-

cal moments and particular cultural contexts in which the adolescent faces his or her developmental tasks, i.e. the transformations that take place in his or her person and result in altered interactions with the self, others and the environment.

In difficult times such as these, the mutability and instability of sociocultural contexts has inevitable repercussions on the adolescent's development of a self. The progressive construction of an adolescent's identity, as is well known, passes through intermediate stages and above all through the overcoming of that 'tremendous' inner conflict, between the id, the superego and the ego. (Einstein & Freud, 1933)

Bruner analysed the intermediate steps of human development and spoke of a 'transactional self'. The transactional self of the adolescent is constructed through meaningful interactions between individuals in particular situations and contexts. First, the obvious biological and maturational changes that affect boys and girls from different social realities and different geographical areas become part of the different interpersonal relationships. These are the first signs of a structural change that will slowly lead to the formation of an adult, free person, who is responsible for themselves and their own destiny.

The major technological transformations and changes in life habits that we witness today have a considerable impact on the affective and cognitive development of adolescents. On a sociocultural level, today's adolescent finds it harder than in the past to overcome the natural transitional phases and to resolve the inner conflict that will lead him or her towards the formation of a mature and balanced personality. The crisis of parenthood and especially the decline of paternal authority have weakened the strength of the superego, which finds it increasingly difficult to dominate the uncontrollable drives of the id. Today's hedonistic, nihilistic and relativistic culture that idolizes the body and extols 'free pleasure' and 'in all directions' also stimulates disorderly drives that it amplifies, exalts and mixes up to such an extent that their management by the ego becomes increasingly problematic. Proof of this can be seen in the enormous proliferation of psychological and/or psychiatric disorders of a relational or sexual nature, such as aggression, social withdrawal, anxiety, depression, hyper-sexuality and gender dysphoria, which nowadays arise more and more frequently in the adolescent phase and can con-

tinue into adulthood, affecting personal well-being and relationships with others (Lambiase & Cantelmi, 2020).

On the level of technological transformations, we will limit ourselves to presenting a few phenomenological considerations that allow us to delve further into the reality of adolescence. Today's teenager is a digital native. Most probably, until a few years ago, he or she was a child growing up in a house equipped with a computer and many digital devices.

Even before entering the adolescent phase, today's teenagers have learnt to use technological tools as a medium of communication and not only as tools for study or as a source of entertainment, as is the case, for example, with playing video games.

In the Internet age, it is possible to communicate at a distance by making telematic contact with people far away, creating friendships without knowing those in whom one confides important aspects of one's life. Digital existence and virtual relationships are the essence of a young person's everyday life.

Also, in relation to current technological developments, today's adolescents have at their disposal mobile phones through which, while they can easily communicate with each other, they are more closely monitored by adults, who can remotely monitor their movements and reassure themselves about their activities. Again, technological tools characterize adolescents' learning processes in the school context. The use of audiovisual media, hypertexts and more or less sophisticated software changes both teachers' ways of presenting knowledge and adolescents' ways of approaching school content.

In the last three years, then, due to the restrictions imposed by the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the necessary activation of distance learning, the time adolescents spend alone in front of a smartphone has inevitably increased.

Digital tools are an indispensable necessity for contemporary adolescents to have a relationship with others and the world. Digital tools are actually a cultural and relational resource unprecedented in history. However, virtual reality is not without its sometimes-hidden pitfalls. Adolescents have little perception of the dangers and traps that lurk behind a screen.

Often online, teenagers are not only victims or perpetrators of

bullying, but they also explore untrustworthy sites and rely on mendacious sources of knowledge. Sometimes they commit crimes without even being aware of it, and they just as easily share private information, such as photographs and videos, which can expose them to unpredictable consequences.

Alongside the old problems of being a transitional age that leads adolescents to being in need of new experiences, friendships and secure models and anchorages, to which they can refer and with which they can compare themselves in order to build their own unique and unrepeatable identities, there are also new needs for understanding and constant guidance on how to use the web properly. Adolescents need to fully understand the new technologies and to accelerate, with the help of adults, new communicative dynamics favoured by technology so that, through the common commitment to a safer web, they can come to better know themselves, others and the world.

3.2.5 Online literature: a resource for multidimensional and multimodal literacy

The reflection conducted in the previous sections reaches its conceptual climax here. Let us recall the question posed at the beginning of the essay and now try to understand, in light of the reflections conducted in the previous sections, the relationship that exists between the individual and society, and, more specifically, between individual education and the degree of social development of a people. Is it possible to say – we asked ourselves at the beginning – that where there are, in the world, serious political and social problems and international conflicts, perhaps the training and education provided by schools and families has been lacking with respect to the cultural values of personal development, democracy, justice, peace, defence of the human person, freedom of thought and cooperation?

The reference to Cole's and Bruner's theories of self-development set out in the previous section allows us to answer the question posed in a positive manner. It is now clear that the biunivocity of individual-environment interaction is a scientifically incontrovertible fact. Currently, historical contingencies and the sudden social and cultural transformations associated with postmodernity have distracted collective attention from crucial cultural issues that are in-

dispensable for the education of humankind and, in particular, for the complete and affectively balanced cognitive development of individuals. The social, political and cultural drifts are there for all to see.

Over the past two decades, the education imparted to the younger generations by schools has certainly lacked the universal values and cultural instances of authenticity of interpersonal relations, self-care, democracy, justice, peace, defence of the human person, freedom of thought, cooperation, religious faith and so many important topics that ensure the complete and constant formation of a human being.

In the face of such a scenario, a change of course is necessary and unavoidable. It is now necessary to move towards the renewal of formal education provided by schools, proposing new contents and new teaching methodologies that are in line with the times and the deepest expectations of the human mind and heart (Corsi, 2015; Elia, 2021).

It is also necessary to launch new humanizing educational research experiences and new school policies that accompany the younger generations in their growth processes. It is important to move to a new school that is not afraid to confront the deep and ultimate questions about what it is to be human, i.e. those questions concerning life and the meaning of existence. It is high time to renew schools and propose a new pedagogical model that helps young people cultivate a passion for study and culture and that helps them overcome the fragmentary vision of existence in which instinctive and emotional dimensions prevail. It is a matter of moving from emotion to a life project, from erudition and notionism to knowledge and wisdom, and to a life in which human rationality, spirituality and emotionality are finally reunited, pacified and integrated into a 'unicum'.

In this utopian vision of a renewed school that is more student-friendly and more in tune with the times lies the future of human society. In this new model of a school that promotes well-being, kindness and happiness, in addition to the old knowledge and curricular disciplines, stripped of the superfluous, there is room for new technologies, new digital tools and all the unexplored potential of the web. In fact, online literature and the web can also be an indis-

pensable resource to arouse pupils' interest and to promote multidimensional and multimodal literacy.

The new pedagogical model, which we intend to announce and promote here, appears to be scientifically sound according to two pedagogical theories. The first theory is the result of Cole's cross-cultural research, which states that individuals develop cultural tools and cognitive skills in those areas of existence that have relevance and meaning for them. Now that the web and digital devices have an almost structural relevance and meaning for digital natives, it is plausible to assume that the younger generations are more likely to receive a multimodal and multidimensional literacy and learn new contents and values from online literature, even more so than from paper books and traditional teaching methods, which must be used simultaneously anyway.

The second theory that asserts the use of the web and new technologies to convey contents and methodologies for learning with a high socio-ethical-affective content is the cognitive theory of multimedia learning proposed by Richard Mayer. This theory is one of the most comprehensive theoretical models that attempt to explain the cognitive dynamics underlying multimedia learning (Mayer, 2000). The author, taking into account Paivio's concept of dual coding and Chandler and Sweller's concept of cognitive load, has developed an integrated model that demonstrates the usefulness and effectiveness of visual communication for learning (Sweller, 1988; Paivio, 1991).

Now, at a time when the individual seems immersed in an increasingly widespread experience of intellectual and human loneliness and aridity, and at a time when the individual appears to be enclosed in a sort of cognitive narcissism and solipsism, combined with new forms of pessimism and nihilism, which render one incapable of authentic relations with others and long-term planning (Bauman, 20011; D'Addelfio, 2021; De Angelis, 2021), it is necessary to propose and implement a new pedagogical model.

In light of all of this, the question remains as to whether our new pedagogical model, oriented towards the integral formation of the human person, will be able to affect the reality of youth in the short term, promoting a new multidimensional and multimodal literacy that is capable of building a better humanity and society.

3.3 Intellectual and emotional growth factors in the educational relationship: new frontiers in education

The starting point of this reflection on the issues of the new frontiers of education is the consideration of some limitations and gaps. These gaps, rather than referring to «external» factors, seem to be attributable instead to “internal” and “implicit” factors. The “external” factors are the disparity of resources between different schools, the adequate provision of digital devices and compensatory instruments at the time of COVID-19, the accompaniment of professional educators, and the adequate amount of support that managers and territorial steering committees can give to a subject, which all certainly have a heavy impact on the quality of education. However, they do not explain the deep educational crisis whose roots go far beyond the present time and precede the pandemic. The current educational crisis evokes rather the psycho-pedagogical and epistemic universe of the human being and, at the same time, the existence phenomenology. This presupposes philosophical-theoretical, affective-relational and ethical-behavioural knowledge, which, at present, is little known and little investigated by pedagogy.

Currently, pedagogical knowledge does not always consider this knowledge and remains behind, still proposing an idea of training intended as a mere “transmission of information and increasingly specialized notions”. At the most, pedagogy is then limited to denouncing some drifts of contemporary education and to listing some negative behavioural traits of today’s students (for instance, aggression, individualism, immaturity, inability to dialogue with adults, etc.), without investigating the cause of all of this, nor seeking possible «remedies» through school and education. For this reason, we can affirm that we are a long way from the possibility of concretely promoting health and well-being inside and outside school.

Recently, Hoggan-Kloubert and Hoggan (2022) reflected on the current epistemic crisis and the need to renew education by promoting rationality, autonomy and pluralism. With regard to adult education, the authors affirm the need to develop epistemologically responsible learners and the usefulness of promoting public spaces open to dialogue and learning (agora) (Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2022).

Our opinion is that it is very necessary to deepen these issues and that some negative behavioural traits of today's students depend on the idea that the training in school is still separated from concrete life. This is because of the cultural stereotype that continues to prevail in the pedagogical field. This stereotype is related to the positivistic vision of the human, reducing man to a «rational animal» to be «filled» as much as possible with hyper-specialist knowledge.

However, the life sciences, particularly phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics, describe man in a different way: as a multidimensional compendium of 'nature and culture', of 'spirit and body', of 'intelligence, will, affectivity and rationality'. A plurality of dimensions, therefore, that need to be formed, in the course of life, in a continuous, complete and unitary way, without omitting any of them (Guardini, 1953; Ricoeur, 2016; De Angelis et al., 2018; De Angelis, 2018).

Due to this cultural stereotype, school curricula are still unbalanced on the development of the cognitive dimension at the expense of the affective, volitive, ethical and relational dimensions of the individual. The consequences of this are evident, and the mass media are increasingly reporting on the general malaise in schools.

After all, thinking of the present or the more recent past, who could deny in their teacher experience having listened to complaints and narratives of experiences of «dissatisfaction» from their colleagues concerning «misunderstandings», «defects in interpersonal communication», «individualism» or even «solipsistic closures»? Who could then deny having witnessed or having been the protagonist himself in the school of events in which he felt a sort of «limit» or «impotence» in the educational relationship? We refer to experiences that do not necessarily depend on the «lack of notions», «education» or «tools» suitable for the implementation of an inclusive and efficient teaching. We are thinking about events related to the need for a deeper knowledge of the human being, its «ontology», «axiology» and the «universe of motivations» and «psychological and affective relational meanings» that give impulse to action.

These are issues that in recent decades have been sidelined and which pedagogy has relegated to the margins of knowledge. This happened because the discipline that studies education and training processes has pursued a rapid «rise» to the peaks of the life sciences'

pyramid. To do this, it has emptied itself of theoretical content and value references (so useful for the integral formation of the human being). It has declined towards a “notionalism” that the scenarios offered by new technologies have been made more “beautiful” and “poetic”, but this seems inadequate with respect to the formation of a being, the man, who even according to the definitions of neuroscience is a compendium of body and spirit (Eccles, 1994).

How many times have teachers been left alone and experienced a deep impasse when called to face complex relational dynamics, which may involve the primary relationship with the pupils to follow or interact with the class? How often does the comparison with colleagues, families, psychologists, professional educators and other socio-health figures not translate into a concrete didactic action for the benefit of the pupils because of multiple misunderstandings? How often must the roles of «mediator», «facilitator of communications», «interpreter», «motivational speaker», «father and mother», «teacher» and «model» be completely improvised and badly sketched at best by the most hard-working, attentive and sensitive teachers? How often, on the other hand, do teachers prefer living educational relationships that are not significant but superficial and formal, which make them unable to enter into the trusting and transforming climate of «empathic relationships, true and humane» (Calvani, 2011; Elia, 2021; De Angelis, 2018, 2021)?

In recent decades, the educational relationship has been reduced to a mere transmission of information, notions and specialist knowledge that does not affect the lives of students, nor their potential for perfectibility (De Angelis, 2018).

3.3.1 *The need to rediscover the focus of education*

The statistical and hermeneutic analysis of the data collected in the exploratory survey conducted over three years of observation (2019–2021) on the new implicit needs of education allows us to untie an essential pedagogical knot. Discussions with current teachers (for at least three consecutive years) have enabled us to grasp a new educational emergency: the need to rediscover the focus of education, which in our opinion consists of teaching «the art of being human»

through an assiduous and credible witness, the teacher. This evidence, which for us represents the first provisional outcome of a longitudinal exploratory survey conducted (over two years of observation) on a sample of 250 teachers serving in Italian schools, using a qualitative-quantitative methodology, appears to be in line with what has recently been reported in contemporary pedagogical literature.

In fact, nationally and internationally, a broad debate has looked at ethical competence as an integral and fundamental part of a teacher's professionalism. This debate underlines the dual task of teachers as moral agents: they must behave morally, and at the same time they must morally train the students (Elia, 2021). For this reason, it is important that teachers become fully aware of how their decisions – for example, communication with students, the organization of the lesson and the choice of contents – could influence their overall teaching work.

Teaching is one of those professions that is not easy to learn to exercise. Like all aid professions, teaching causes emotional dynamics that often result in feelings of inadequacy, affect the level of self-esteem and trigger defensive mechanisms of various kinds.

For this reason, all teachers should be helped, to constantly review their performance, which begins before entering the school, to identify their areas of strength and weakness and to try to orchestrate them so as to build an integrated and unitary professional profile. (Elia, 2021) In order for a teacher to activate a good educational process, it is not enough to possess certain cultural and disciplinary skills, but rather it is necessary to develop socio-ethical-affective skills that, from time to time, help teachers to know how to teach.

The teacher must be able to organize the learning context, set up good communication and build a training curriculum that facilitates learning. They must also be able to plan and evaluate and often recognize situations of discomfort or manage conflicts within the class.

This whole series of multiskills, implicit in teaching professionalism, recalls the urgent need to improve ministerial training curricula to train new teachers to be well prepared in everything, and able to face the new emergencies and challenges of contemporary education. In light of this, the recovery of the focus of education appears to be essential so that the experiences of didactic virtuosity,

such as the one described before, are believed to be possible and within the reach of all teachers.

The urgent need to relocate the centre of gravity of the educational process to the human person and its potential for perfectibility is now clear. It is also necessary to recognize that the human being, ontologically structured in the form of an embodied spirit, according to the existentialism of the Danish philosopher Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813–1855), continually has to make indelible and non-transferable choices for his own existence.

These choices go far beyond a bureaucratization of teaching and concern the intimate and personal sphere of the individual, calling into question the freedom of each one. However, reaching such a profound awareness of the preciousness of the educational mission (which can leave an indelible mark on the conscience of the pupils) is not an automatic or foregone conclusion. Teachers need to be trained by others for this introspective and metacognitive path.

Currently it is widely believed that the teacher just has to contribute to the formation of «well-made brains», and so many critical issues in the school seem incomprehensible and unsolvable. We insist on directing all disciplinary curricular teaching toward the cognitive development of pupils and to the acquisition of notions, which is increasingly specialized, scrupulously evaluated and certified by schools. However, perhaps we do not realize that this way of conceiving of school and teaching, together with a cognitive overhead, increases the individual's split between mind and body, intelligence and will, spirit and nature, knowledge and life, with unpredictable repercussions for the behavioural choices that the person in question is called on to accomplish.

Dissatisfaction and aggression, individualism and insensitivity, together with incommunicability are some of the most widespread character traits among young people in postmodernity, which seem inexplicable to parents and teachers, who are becoming increasingly dismayed and disoriented (Bellingreri, 2005; Booth & Ainscow, 2008; Mortari, 2014; Lucivero & Petracca, 2015; Lucivero, 2020). We ask ourselves, then, whether the fact that the ministerial programmes currently focus only on the acquisition of abstract, purely intellectual knowledge and certifiable skills, suitable for educating human reason and the visible, «external» dimension of the human

being, just to become a «performing machine» called upon to continually manifest its production efficiency, could affect the negative situation of society.

We wonder if it should perhaps not be important to also «include» in the ministerial programmes the other ontological dimensions of the individual, the ones concerning the sphere of feelings, and the will that in order to be activated requires special didactic projects. We ask ourselves whether the human growth of individuals in these fields is the responsibility of schools and teachers or rather of fortuitous life circumstances, which actually discriminate against individuals and make them unequal in terms of learning and education. Finally, we ask ourselves whether the current political choices, which neglect the ethical-affective and volitional-intentional dimensions in the formation of individuals, are perhaps not depriving the students of the possibility of being prepared to live a life that is “good”, “happy”, “human” and “successful” in civil society.

In light of the considerations presented and supported by empirical research, it appears mandatory to invite pedagogy to reflect on its role and on the possibilities; it actually has to stem these drifts of contemporary education.

3.3.2 How to promote well-being, resilience and prosociality at school

In response to these questions raised by the hermeneutical reflection on the empirical data that we have collected, the idea that we support is the idea of the need to renew education, starting from an ontological understanding of the human being. This conclusion is the provisional outcome of the qualitative-quantitative research conducted among teachers in service at Italian schools to explore the implicit training needs of teachers.

What seems more reasonable to us to affirm, in light of the data collected, is that in Italian schools, it is no longer enough to train «well-made heads», that is, minds filled with specialized knowledge and notions. To fulfil the educational mission, much more is needed, and specifically it is essential to aim at the complete development of the human person. This involves the cognitive, psychological, social,

ethical, affective and more broadly spiritual dimensions of the individual.

The complete formation of individuals, moreover, cannot be separated from a personalized accompaniment in the growth processes, from an existential planning, from the acquisition of virtuous and sustainable behavioural postures. It cannot be separated from an effective and constant action capable of soliciting the potential of human perfectibility, orienting it towards the achievement of personal excellence and the common good, in a civic sense.

Education and school, at a time of fragility and in a global health crisis and in the current international crisis, cannot fail to have the happiness of the pupils and the common good at heart. This is the global challenge of education in our contemporary world, “teaching the art of being human”, and teachers cannot be left alone to face it. This is the result of our qualitative and quantitative research.

After all, it is well known that there are countless stories everywhere in the world of intelligent and cultured pupils but who are «deviant» in their behaviour and dissatisfied because their training was not inserted into existential scenarios with meaning and values. There is a compelling need to train “well-made people” in schools, individuals who are complete and fully realized, capable of carrying out good and virtuous work that favors both themselves and the social community.

Moreover, due to the particular role that pedagogy plays in the context of the human sciences, it should begin to dare much more, we would say downstream, in penetrating with its values, with its specific idea of *paideia*, into the institutional and legislative mechanism to mark with the teacher’s imprint the regulatory framework within which they are placed. In the United States, pedagogy is beginning to reflect upon these crucial issues concerning the educational universe and its evolution in the near future. At one of the most prestigious and oldest universities in the world, Yale University in the United States, a course on happiness has been running for almost a year and has become the most popular in the history of the university. The «Psychology and the Good Life» seminar was inaugurated on January 12 and immediately achieved enormous success. Not surprisingly, according to the rector of the university, it is the most popular seminar in the last 317 years.

To understand the fame of Laurie Santos's course, just consider that as soon as the registrations were opened, 300 people were enrolled. In just three days, the number had doubled, and within a week, it had tripled. Today, a third of the students enrolled at Yale for three years want to take part in Professor Santos's study, and the requests have not stopped yet.

Laurie Santos tackles many issues in her happiness course. In particular, it teaches students how to change behaviour to also change the course of their existence. «Students want to change», revealed the psychologist in an interview with the *New York Times*, talking about the success of the course, «they want to be happy and change the mentality of the campus and of education» (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/nyregion/at-yale-class-on-happiness-draws-huge-crowd-laurie-santos.html>).

Are these, perhaps together with others, the most obvious signs of the need to rethink school and education with a view to promoting a «flourishing inclusion» inside and outside the human person?

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Conclusions

The formative processes of the younger generations in the school environment require an urgent ontological reappropriation by educational theory.

At a time when, as Maria Montessori stated almost a century ago in *The Secret of Childhood* (1936), ‘the consciousness of mankind is submerged in a deep sleep’ and society ‘is like an immense railway convoy advancing at dizzying speed, towards a distant point, and the individuals composing it can be compared to travellers sleeping inside the compartments’, it is necessary to promote the awakening of consciences (Montessori, 1950, p. 301).

At a time when, in the face of so much external progress and so many means and technologies available to individuals, civilization seems to be reverting to ancient forms of barbarism, it is necessary to rediscover the secret not only of the child, but also of the adult and more generally of the human person.

Today, it is necessary for the whole of society to be reminded of the splendour and mystery of human life, in so many ways humiliated, vilified, neglected, violated and instrumentalized, in order to pull it from the dangerous abyss in which it lies.

It is that sleep of conscience that is ‘the most powerful obstacle to receiving vital help, a saving truth’. If this were not so, said Montessori, ‘the world could progress rapidly: there would not be the dangerous contrast between the ever-increasing speed of the means

of transport of matter and the ever-increasing rigidity of the human spirit' (Montessori, 1950, pp. 301–302).

This is why we believe, with Montessori, still today that 'the first step, the most difficult in any social movement for collective progress', consists 'in the tremendous task of awakening slumbering and insensitive humanity, forcing it to listen to the voice that calls' (Montessori, 1950, p. 302).

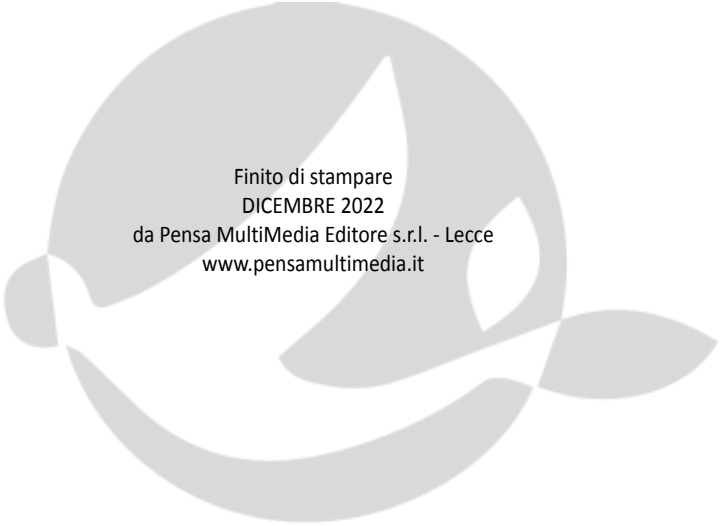
This call, which particularly involves the theory of education, requires reaffirmation of the pedagogical primacy of the individual, considered in all its constituent dimensions. A great help to pedagogy, in this new and singular social task, can come from the richness of the Western cultural heritage, especially the philosophical and religious one, to which pedagogy can and must make constant reference.

Recent transformative educational theories, advanced and innovative philosophical, phenomenological and hermeneutic theoretical models of moral exemplars, can also help educational theory to lead a cultural renewal and encounter fruitful fields of application, as current educational research shows.

Faced with the current educational crisis, nihilism, relativism, human, political and economic recession, sad passions, the return of imperialism and new forms of tyranny; faced with ideologisms and generalized confusion, international conflicts and the fear of a new world conflict; faced with the blindness of minds and consciences before the macabre spectacle of evil, now trivialized, and the pain of the human person; we affirm the hope of a change that is still possible. We affirm the dream of a better world.

And to sleeping consciences we speak through the language of dreams: the dream of a better school, one that prepares a better, more humane and happy society, as happy is a child who, in his mother's arms, discovers that he was desired, wanted, accepted and loved by her, from the first moment of his conception, just as he is.

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